THE NEW WESTMINSTER THEOLOGY AND SOUTH AFRICAN EVANGELICALISM

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF JOHN FRAME'S METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY WITH A VIEW TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONTEXTUAL EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY.

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Master of Arts in the Department of Religious Studies.

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ABSTRACT.

This dissertation attempts to answer the question "Do the methodological and epistemological proposals of John M. Frame have anything to contribute to the construction of a contextual evangelical theology in South Africa - a theology which is both faithful to its evangelical roots and yet radically engaged with the contemporary context?"

This question is dealt with in four stages. Firstly, Frame's theology is expounded against the background of its context in America. Secondly, four aspects of Frame's theology are critically evaluated. They are perspectivalism, theology as application, hermeneutics, and the relationship between theology and praxis. This evaluation has three dimensions. It investigates the relationship between Frame's theology and the historic Reformed tradition. It examines the use that is made of Frame's theology by other theologians related to the Westminster Seminaries, in particular, the work of Harvie M. Conn and Vern S. Poythress. Finally, the evaluation seeks to examine the usefullness of Frame's theology in the South Afrian context. This analysis results in the identification of certain weaknesses in Frame's methodological proposals.

The conclusion of this dissertation is that Frame's theology provides certain methodological tools which can be employed in the construction of a contextual South African theology which is both radically engaged with its context, and faithful to the core of the evangelical tradition. For

this to be possible it is proposed that certain

modifications need to be made to overcome the weaknesses of

Frame's theology. These modifications are the following:

the integration of a strongly christological approach to

Frame's concept of lordship with particular reference to a

theology of the cross; the affirmation that God is, in a

particular way, the God of the poor and oppressed; an

understanding of the accommodated and context-relatedness of

biblical revelation, and the incorporation of perspectives

from the sociology of knowledge.

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This dissertation could not have been completed without the assistance of a number of people.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. John De Gruchy, for his guidance and help in the writing of this dissertation. His influence on this dissertation extends beyond his supervision, in that his writings and lectures have had a major influence on the development of my theological understanding. My wrestling with developing a theological response to the South African context has been strongly influenced by two resources, the New Westminster Theology and the work of John De Gruchy. It is therefore particularly appropriate that this thesis on the New Westminster Theology should be supervised by John De Gruchy.

Secondly, I would like to thank Profs. John Frame, Vern Poythress and Harvie Conn for their creative contributions to theology. In particular, I would like to thank them for their help in the writing of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Mrs. Jackie vanden Bos of Westminster Theological Seminary in California for helping me to acquire John Frame's lecture outlines.

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Soli Deo Gloria.

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CHAPTER I   INTRODUCTION.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that John M.
Frame's epistemological and methodological proposals can
play a major role in developing a contextual evangelical
theology in South Africa. This introduction will seek to
justify this proposal by engaging in three tasks. Firstly,
certain key concepts will be defined, secondly, the origins
and purpose of this research will be discussed, and thirdly,
the methodology that is used will be outlined.

1 DEFINITIONS.

The New Westminster Theology refers to a new methodological
approach to theology that has been developed within the
context of the Westminster theological seminaries in the
U.S.A. Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia was started in
1930 to preserve and further the Old Princeton tradition and
more recently a new seminary was established in Escondido,
California. The theology produced by the Westminster
faculty has shifted from a largely defensive to a more
creative stance. Part of this shift has been the
epistemological and methodological proposals of John M.
Frame who teaches apologetics and systematic theology at
the California campus. He has interacted extensibly with
the New Testament scholar, Vern S. Poythress, who teaches at
the Philadelphia campus. Harvie Conn, a Missiologist at
the Philadelphia campus has made a creative use of Frame's
and Poythress' ideas. This dissertation will focus on

Frame's work but will also interact with that of Poythress and Conn.

The title "evangelical" has been used in a wide variety of contexts with different meanings. In the context of this thesis it refers to that group of traditions, institutions and people who bear certain family resemblances. The concept of family resemblance refers to the similarities and differences often seen in a family. Each member of the family will have some of the family characteristics, but in varying degrees. Yet there is an unmistakable resemblance amongst the members of the family.

The family characteristics of evangelicalism would include the following. A strong emphasis on the supreme authority of Scripture; this emphasis is shared by all members of the family, but it is understood in a number of different ways. The acceptance of the historic orthodox creeds of the church. An understanding of salvation as by grace alone through faith alone. This is often combined with an event-centred and experiential understanding of "conversion". A strongly experiential understanding of the Christian life is present in most evangelical groupings. Evangelicals emphasise the evangelistic task of the church and this is often seen as the church's primary mission.

This broad family has been subdivided in various ways using different typologies. [1] The major focus of this dissertation is upon those sometimes defined as conservative evangelicals. [2] They represent the dominant form of evangelicalism in South Africa, though they, do not

necessarily constitute the majority of evangelicals.

The third term that needs to be defined is Reformed
Orthodoxy. This is used to refer to the post-reformation
Reformed dogmatic theology which is expressed in the
various confessions of the European Reformed churches. For
the purpose of this dissertation it is typified by the
Westminster Confession. Reformed Orthodoxy has influenced
the New Westminster theology via two nineteenth century
expressions of this tradition. The first is the Old
Princeton tradition and the second is Dutch Neo-Calvinism.
Both of these forms of Reformed theology were deeply rooted
in Reformed orthodoxy yet modified it in various ways.

2 THE ORIGINS OF THIS RESEARCH.

This dissertation arises out of my personal pilgrimage of
struggling to bring together three major influences on my
theological understanding. The first influence was the
conservative evangelical heritage in which I was brought up.
My understanding of this tradition was shaped by studies at
the Bible Institute of South Africa, which emphasised a
Reformed interpretation of this tradition.

The second influence was a growing awareness of the
injustice and oppression of apartheid. This was combined
with the third influence, an encounter with the challenge of
liberation theologies which highlighted dimensions of the
Bible that my conservative evangelical heritage could not
assimilate. This heritage was also unable to provide
adequate theological tools to answer the pressing needs of

South African society. The dominant form of evangelicalism failed to address the South African crisis. Those who saw the need and addressed issues faced difficulties relating traditional evangelical theology to the pressing socio-political crisis. [3]

I propose that this is partially the result of an understanding of theology as a system of propositional truths contained in the Bible. This system is often seen to have had its almost definitive expression in the Reformation and post-Reformation period. Theology is thus seen as essentially a-contextual and is not open to major reformulation.

The New Westminster Theology provides a methodology which opens the way for a creative engagement with the South African context. While many of its proposals are not unique, and some of the arguments used might appear convoluted, its importance lies in its origins in the Westminster/Princeton tradition. This tradition played a formative role in the development of conservative evangelical theology. The value of the New Westminster Theology is emphasised by the influence the Old Princeton tradition and Reformed Orthodoxy had on the development of a theological model which is unable to engage its context in a creative and radical manner. [4]

One might rightly ask, what has Cape Town to do with Philadelphia? Does this dissertation not seek merely to continue the dependance of third world evangelicals on western models of doing theology? My contention in this

dissertation is not that the New Westminster Theology must be adopted as the new model for doing theology in South Africa. I would rather contend that it provides certain methodological tools which can be appropriated in the development of a South African evangelical theology. Such a theology should, however, draw on a wide variety of resources and be rooted in the realities of the South African context. The New Westminster Theology's contribution lies in its enabling evangelicals to be both faithful to the core commitments of their tradition and radically engaged with their context.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this dissertation is fundamentally theological in character and is seen to involve four dimensions. The first dimension is a critical evaluation of John Frame's theology against the background of its context within Americal evangelicalism. The second dimension is an historical theological investigation of the theological roots of The New Westminster Theology. The third dimension is an evaluation of the use that has been made of Frame's methodology and epistemology. Finally, an attempt is made to move beyond the perceived weaknesses of Frame's ideas.

Fundamental to the methodology are two other factors which determine the perspective from which this critique is undertaken. The first factor is that it is undertaken from a selfconsciously evangelical position. The thesis of this

dissertation is that Frame's approach provides tools which enable evangelicals (particularly conservative evangelicals) to develop radical contextual theologies while remaining true to the basic convictions of their traditions. As such these basic convictions have not been subject to critique but rather selfconsciously assumed. The critique and the attempt to move beyond the New Westminster theology assumes a high view of the biblical authority described by the concept of intentional inerrancy.[5]

The second fundamental factor is the hermeneutical key used to provide the criteria for the evaluation of Frame's theology. The fundamental key used is the question of the relevance of Frame's theology for the production of a radical contextual South African evangelical theology. This key is based on the presupposition that theology must be done from the perspective of the poor and oppressed members of society. This dissertation therefore, ignores other perspectives which might be validly used to critique Frame's thought. In pursuing this goal I recognise the limitations of my socialisation as a white middle-class male and of my own failure to consistently work out this presupposition.

The reference system used in the documentation is that of N. Visser, <u>Handbook for Writers of Essays and Theses</u>.[6]

Notes to Introduction.

1 See for example the analyses found in J.W. de Gruchy, "The Great Evangelical Reversal : South African Reflections", Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 24 (1978), 45-57, C.A. Lund," A Critical Evaluation of Evangelicalism in South Africa" (M.A. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1988), pp. 8-40 and D.S. Walker, "Radical Evangelicalism and the Poor" (Ph.D. Thesis University of Natal, 1990), pp. 28-35.

2 De Gruchy defines conservative evangelicalism as the group which "regards itself as carrying on the evangelical tradition of both historic protestantism and pietism, with a strong emphasis on biblical scholarship and piety along conservative lines." De Gruchy, p. 46. In the South African context however, biblical scholarship has not played the major role it has in the American and British contexts. Walker has described Conservative Evangelicalism as follows: "The heart of this form of evangelicalism lies in its biblically orientated doctrine of the grace of God to sinful persons and its resulting concern for mission and evangelism. The adjective conservative is primarily theologically conceived as the conservation of the "faith once delivered to the saints", over against liberal theology which is seen as adapting unchangeable truth." Walker, p. 34. He goes on to note that it is this form of evangelicalism which is often seen to represent the movement as a whole.

3 My work as a staff person at the Student YMCA at the University of Cape Town has highlighted this problem. Students coming out of Conservative Evangelical backgrounds have often experienced great difficulty in relating their faith to the socio-political realities of South Africa. This difficulty often results in them severely modifying their evangelical heritage or escaping into a privatised and spiritualised form of Christianity.

4 See Walker, pp. 44-54. The use of the term Radical Evangelical theology refers to an evangelical theology which is characterised by a deep commitment to justice for the poor and oppressed arising out of a recognition that God is in a special way the God of the poor.

5 See Chapter 1 section 2.2.

6 See N. Visser, Handbook for Writers of Essays and Theses (Pinelands, Maskew Miller Longman, 1989), pp. 66-68.

CHAPTER II   THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW WESTMINSTER THEOLOGY.

1   THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

While the roots of the New Westminster Theology can be
traced back to the Reformation and beyond, it developed
within the context of the resurgence of evangelical theology
in the 1970s and 80s.   It must therefore be analysed
against this background and in terms of the broader dynamics
of American life in this period.

1.1 The Resurgence of American Evangelicalism

Westminster Seminary was a product of the fundamentalist
controversies of the 1920s and 30s, and has been part of
the development of the Evangelical Movement in America.
It has always been uncomfortable with the   label
"evangelical" or "fundamentalist", insisting rather that
its role is the defence and proclamation of the historic
Reformed faith in all its fullness. It sees its place within
the "patchwork quilt"[1] of American evangelicalism as that
of a confessional body which has a critical identification
with American Evangelicalism, sharing certain common ideas
on themes, yet critical of dimensions within
evangelicalism that it finds incompatible with its
Reformed heritage.[2] Yet it has   played a major role in
the development of evangelicalism, providing academic and
scholarly leadership for the movement, both in terms of the
work produced by the faculty, and in terms of its alumni,
many of whom have become influential figures in

evangelicalism.

In the aftermath of the fundamentalist controversies, many fundamentalists withdrew from the secular world and its centres of learning and developed a network of denominations, Bible colleges, publications and missions, thus becoming a subculture within American society. The tide began to turn in the late 1940s and the 50s under the leadership of people such as Billy Graham, Edward J. Carnell and Carl F. H. Henry. A key turning point was the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1948, which included most open-minded conservatives - in contrast to the more strictly separatist fundamentalists. This group encouraged a greater openness to scholarly study of the Bible and to engaging with modern society in all areas of life. In addition, they linked up with evangelicals who had remained within the mainline denominations when the fundamentalist split had occurred, and with confessional churches, such as the Christian Reformed Church, which had not been part of the fundamentalist split and which did not feel at home with the separatist fundamentalists. There were also increased relationships with people holding similar views in other countries. <u>Christianity Today</u>, under the editorship of Carl Henry, drew on a number of non-American theologians and scholars, and the World Congress on Evangelism at Berlin in 1986 continued this process. A new feature was the rise of Third World evangelical leadership out of the church produced by North American and European missionaries. The 1974 International Congress on World Evangelism, the

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism (founded at the
Congress) and the World Evangelical Fellowship became forums
in which the voice of Third World Evangelicals was heard.

Evangelical, biblical and theological activity increased
in the post 1950s era. Initially this was largely confined
to the areas of Biblical Studies and Apologetics, as both
these areas were in the forefront of theological
controversy. Westminster Seminary made major contributions
in both areas through the work of Cornelius van Til, Ned B.
Stonehouse and Edward J. Young. The latter two, in addition
to their individual contributions, took up the editorship of
a projected series of Biblical commentaries, the New
International Commentary on the Old and New Testament. This
series has grown and has been a major influence despite the
early death of both Stonehouse and Young. Edward J. Carnell,
Carl F. H. Henry, Bernard Ramm and others began to address
the area of apologetics and systematic theology, though
until the late 1970s and early 1980s, only a few creative
contributions to Systematic Theology were made. Carl Henry
completed his massive six volumes entitled <u>God, Revelation
and Authority</u>.[3] Numerous monographs have appeared and
compendiums of Systematic Theology have been contributed by
Dale Moody, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson, Thomas Finger
and others.[4] While some of these demonstrate a creative
wrestling with theological issues, others are merely a
restating of traditional ideas. Of particular importance
have been recent attempts to grapple with methodological
issues, a development which indicates the growing maturity

of the movement and points to a more creative future.
Examples of this trend include the collection of essays
under the editorship of R. K. Johnston entitled <u>The Use of</u>
<u>the Bible in Theology - Evangelical Options</u>, John J. Davis's
<u>Foundations of Evangelical Theology</u>, Charles Kraft's
<u>Christianity in Culture</u>, Harvie Conn's <u>Eternal Word and</u>
<u>Changing Worlds</u>, John Frame's <u>The Doctrine of the Knowledge</u>
<u>of God</u> and Vern Poythress's <u>Symphonic Theology</u>.[5]

Evangelical Theology has been challenged in a number of
areas since its resurgence. These include the development of
evangelical social and political thought, the so-called
"Battle for the Bible", the challenge of missiology in
various forms, the emergence of the charismatic movement,
and the rise of evangelical feminism.

In the aftermath of the fundamentalist controversy, most
conservative Christians withdrew from the socio-political
arena. Where they did involve themselves, it was largely in
the realm of a patriotic love for America, a strong anti-
communist agenda, and support for the capitalist system.
With the emergence of the Evangelical movement there was an
attempt to recover their lost social conscience.
Evangelical social thought has not been monolithic; for the
sake of classification one can identify an evangelical
left, centre and right.

The evangelical centre developed out of Carl Henry's
call for a renewal of evangelical social concern though, to
some extent, it has moved to the left of him. While there is
some diversity in this grouping, they are united by their

more critical attitude to Western capitalism and American foreign policy, combined with a commitment to work within the system in order to change it. Much of the intellectual leadership of this movement draws its ideas from the Holiness, Reformed and Lutheran traditions, and many are associated with the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin College and Seminary, and the Reformed Journal.

The evangelical left largely draws on the Anabaptist tradition and the work of some Third World theologies. It is characterised by a strong criticism of the American social system, foreign policy and militarism, and a commitment to community, the simple life style and the poor. In more recent years, along with the centre left evangelicals, it has included the supporters of evangelical feminism. It is associated with the journals of the Sojourners and the Other Side. Significant leaders from the centre and the left co-operated to produce the 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelicals for Social Concern.

Much of the Evangelical establishment, symbolized by Christianity Today and Billy Graham, favoured a position to the right of Carl Henry, and is best described as the centre right. They held to a position which, while critical of secularism and certain dimensions of modern American life, was strongly patriotic and committed to the concept of a historically more Christian America from which the present society has departed. It was characterised by a general support for capitalism, yet rejected the racism which characterised some of the right wing in America.

The most significant development in the 1970s and 80s was the rise of the New Christian Right. This movement is also fairly diverse, yet it is united by certain common themes such as the concept of an originally Christian America, support for capitalism, and opposition to abortion, pornography, feminism, secular humanism and government welfare programmes. This grouping is strongly Republican and was a strong supporter of the Reagan administration. Of particular significance in relation to the New Westminster Theology was the rise of the Christian Reconstruction Movement in the 1960s. This movement emphasises its roots in Reformed theology in general and Cornelius van Til's theology in particular. Drawing on a post-millennial eschatology, it seeks to work for the reconstruction of society in terms of Old Testament civil law with certain contextual and redemptive historical modifications. It proposes that, as a result of a religious revival, America and the world will be Christianised resulting in the establishment of Christian states which will apply the Mosaic law. While this is not generally to be expected in the near future, Christians are urged to work towards this goal and promote the implementation of Old Testament law on a gradual basis. Much of the evangelical right has been progressively influenced by the ideas and concepts of Christian Reconstructionism.

The second major area of debate has been the so-called "Battle for the Bible". This area was highlighted by

Harold Lindsell's book with this title. Lindsell sharply criticised people, institutions and denominations within the evangelical movement who did not hold to a strict inerrancy position. The book did not start the controversy - it pointed rather to developments that were already taking place.

The debate was carried out in four main areas, namely: first, the theological area, that is, discussions as to what is meant by inerrancy and how it relates to other dimensions of theology; secondly, historical, that is, the discussion of whether or not key historical figures held to inerrancy; thirdly, exegetical, that is, how does the biblical data relate to the concept of inerrancy, and finally, hermeneutical, that is, whether acceptance of inerrancy prescribes a particular hermeneutic. The debate has resulted not only in a bringing to light of considerable diversity within the evangelical movement, but also refinement in the understanding of the concept of inerrancy. Even amongst those who hold to inerrancy there is considerable diversity, particularly in relation to issues of hermeneutics.

The third area of major debate has been issues raised by missiological developments. The first major area of importance here is the rise of the Church Growth School of Missiology associated with Fuller Theological Seminary. The movement made a major impact on evangelical missiology even amongst those who criticised its pragmatism and its narrow understanding of mission. One of the controversial

concepts propagated by the Church Growth Movement was that

of "People Groups". This concept divided the world

population into socio-cultural groupings called "homogeneous

units". It is held that effective evangelism must

concentrate on an individual "homogeneous unit" and that

churches which demonstrate growth are those whose

congregations come from such a unit, and therefore different

churches ought to be established for each "homogeneous

unit". This concept has created a major controversy, as it

denies the visible unity of the church which crosses

boundaries of race, class and culture. It has, however,

given rise to a much greater awareness of socio- cultural

factors in evangelism and in theologising. Other

evangelical missiologies have also taken a closer look at

the social and cultural dynamics of mission and theology.

As a result there has been a growing awareness of the need

for contextualised theologies. This was seen firstly in

relation to non-western theology, but it soon became

evident that all theology was contextual. Western

evangelicals need to be far more aware of the contextual

dynamics of their own theology.

A second major missiological development was the growing

awareness that the church's mission involved far more than

preaching the gospel, that is, it included an involvement

in programs of social upliftment and the struggle for

justice. This however, remains an area of major controversy

within the evangelical movement, with various conflicting

positions being put forward. The influence of Third World

evangelicals and the evangelical political left, the growing awareness of the poverty, injustice and oppression in the third world, and a developing consciousness of the social problems in American society, particularly in relation to the inner city ghettos, has led to a number of American evangelicals developing a broader understanding of mission. Notable examples of this trend include Harvie Conn, Waldron Scott and the late Orlando Costas.

1.2 The Dynamics of American Society

The developments within evangelicalism need to be seen against the background of the broader dynamics of American society. The first factor that needs to be taken into account is the polarisation between religious liberals and religious conservatives, which has become the major dividing line within the context of American religion. From a sociological perspective this has largely replaced earlier divisions between Catholics, Protestants and Jews. While it is obviously a generalisation, these two groups represent different perspectives not only on religion, but also on many of the major socio-political issues such as abortion, feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment, American foreign policy, education and government welfare programs.

There are, of course, groups such as the evangelical left who combine conservative theology with a more liberal and, at times radical, social programme.[6] This divide became more noticeable as the New Christian Right became politically active.

The division between religious liberals and conservatives has been accompanied by a growing pluralism in American society. The initially largely Protestant nation was changed with the immigration of many Catholics and Jews and, more recently, with groups from other religious traditions. This pluralism has also been influenced by other factors. One such factor is that of the concept of freedom of religion and conscience entrenched within the American constitution and ethos, combined with an American individualism which has led to divisions within the various churches and the founding of new religious sects and churches. A second factor is the growth of non-western religions by missionary expansion and immigration. Thirdly, there has been the growth of secularism within society-at-large flowing out of urbanisation, industrialisation and the growth of higher education. The new intellectual elite's attitude to religion is largely that of the religious liberal or that of the secular humanist. This growing pluralism has been supported by a more liberal Supreme Court and, at times, by federal and state authorities which have emphasised the separation between church and state.

This pluralism has been accompanied by a greater state involvement in areas such as welfare and education which were traditionally under the auspices of religious and other volunteer organisations. A growing federal and state bureaucracy has also led to the government's involvement in many areas of life which in the past were free from

government interference. This growth of government involvement has been supported by decisions in the Supreme Court seeking to apply its understanding of the American constitution to a wide variety of religious and volunteer organisations, as well as to the public and private spheres. The result has been that if religious organisations wish to engage in their traditional activities, they can only do so by becoming involved in direct socio-political action.

Finally, it is important to note some of the socio-cultural characteristics of American society. While it is obviously impossible to generalise about such characteristics in relation to a country as large and diverse as the United States, William Dyrness has proposed three main cultural characteristics which apply to white middle class Americans and have a bearing on the relationship between theology and culture.[7] He identifies them as pragmatism, optimism and individualism. Pragmatism is the philosophy that flows out of the confrontation between white Americans and their environment, initially that of the vast land, and later, that of the city. This gave rise to the concept that what is important is whether something works, not whether it is theoretically valid, and that only those ideas and concepts which have practical value are worth pursuing. Optimism is a characteristic which developed from the Puritan ideal of the "city on the hill" into the more secular understanding of the manifest destiny of America as the bearer of democracy and freedom to the world. Individualism arose out of the post

revolutionary emphasis on the rights of the individual. Its

emphasis on the autonomy of each human being pervaded

society, leading to the growth of a democratic culture in

which individuals claimed the right to rule their own

destiny. In the religious sphere, revivalism with its focus

on the individual religious experience encouraged the

development of greater individualism and popularism within

American religion.

2 THE WESTMINSTER TRADITION

Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in 1929 as a

result of the re-organisation of Princeton Seminary. Its

purpose was to continue the tradition of Old Princeton in

the face of the challenges of theological liberalism. It

soon began, however, to develop a theological identity of its

own which drew on the Old Princeton tradition, but was also

influenced by other dimensions of the conservative Reformed

tradition. The most notable of these influences was that of

Dutch Neo-Calvinism.

2.1 Important Westminster Theologians.

2.1.1 J. Gresham Machen.

J. Gresham Machen in many ways represented the Old Princeton

Tradition with its combination of Orthodox Reformed

theology, personal piety and Scottish Common Sense

Philosophy. He was a New Testament scholar and not a

systematic theologian or apologist, yet his involvement in

fundamentalist/liberal debate led him to address both these

areas.

In both New Testament studies and Apologetics Machen worked as an historian and attempted to re-assert the concepts of Common Sense Realism in the face of the historical idealism of the times. Common Sense Realism as used by Machen affirmed that the human mind perceives external reality as it actually is, thus human beings can distinguish between "facts" and the interpretation of, or a theory about, "facts". Truth is therefore objective and absolute for all times and for all people. It is possible for human beings to know truth. People are able to overcome barriers of culture and time to understand the events of the past. There was a need to interpret the factors of the past, but this was to be done by a process of induction, beginning with an examination of the facts in an open-minded manner and followed by a careful attempt to explain all the facts in the form of an hypothesis. Such an hypothesis may need to be revised in the light of new facts.

The only limitations on the human mind were those with respect to the extent of its knowledge. There were no qualitative limits to human knowledge. Thus, for Machen, the noetic dimension of sin is mainly the inability of the unregenerate to take into account the fact of sin. The true interpretation of facts was God's interpretation but facts were facts for everyone. His apologetic was the attempt to show that the only possible interpretation of the facts recorded in the Bible was the one given by the Bible. Faith must be based on a knowledge of the facts, so, if

Christianity is valid,it must be based on the facts of history, thus on an inerrant Bible. The task of the apologist was to demonstrate this.

Machen's approach to theology was that of the major Princetonians. They affirmed that theology was a science and that theologians approached the Bible in the same way that a natural scientist approached nature. The theologians could trust their mental abilities and sense perceptions to give them knowledge of the real facts. The Bible is a collection of facts about God; these must be gathered as diligently and exhaustively as possible. This must be followed by an attempt to formulate a theory which adequately accounts for all the facts and demonstrates the relationship between them. The result of this process is a system of objective truth which is orthodoxy.

The orthodox Reformed system of theology was seen to be in essence the message of the Bible. It had been lost during the middle ages, rediscovered at the Reformation, and expounded in post-Reformation orthodoxy. The Princetonians saw no difference between the theology of Calvin, that of Reformed Orthodoxy, and their own. Machen proposed that theological development was possible via a clearer setting out of the truth contained in the Bible, but he doubted that there would be any major advances from the Westminster Confession. The task of the theologian was not to create new theology but to clarify, restate and defend the theology that had been received in relation to the issues of the day.

Theology was not to be viewed as the product of

Christian piety. Personal piety was important but it must be

viewed as a consequence of right theology and not as its

wellspring.

2.1.2 John Murray.

John Murray taught Systematic Theology from 1930-1966 and

exercised a major influence on the development of theology

at Westminster. Murray defined the task of Systematic

Theology as the setting forth in an

> "orderly and coherent manner the truth respecting
> God and His relations to men and the world. This
> truth is derived from the data of revelation, and
> revelation comprises all those media by which God
> makes Himself and His will known".[8]

In discussing the development of systematic theology in

history he proposed that it arose in response to

> "the demand residing in the fact of revelation,
> namely that the Word of God requires' the most
> exacting attention so that we as individuals and as
> members in the solidaric unity of the church may be
> able to correlate the manifold data of revelation in
> our understanding and the more effectively apply
> this knowledge to all phases of our thinking and
> conduct."[9]

Systematic theology as such functioned as a kind of mediator

between the biblical disciplines and Practical Theology

which, for Murray, was

> "Systematic Theology brought to practical expression
> and application. And this means the whole counsel of
> God brought to bear on every sphere of life and
> particularly upon every phase of the life and witness
> of the church."[10]

This was not to deny that all theologians ought to be aware

of the practical application of God's revelation.

The term revelation in Murray's definition includes both

general and special revelation. Neither of these ought to be viewed in abstraction from each other. Natural theology was not to function as a separate locus in, or as the basis of, Systematic Theology. The primary source of revelation is the Bible, and Murray's theological method was essentially exegetical. He would begin with the careful exegesis of relevant biblical passages, emphasising the need to understand them in their redemptive historical context.[11] The teaching of the various passages would then be related together in order to develop a coherent understanding of a particular doctrine.

While Murray's method was strongly exegetical, he did not deny the importance of the historical development of Systematic Theology, which he viewed as part of the church's growth in maturity. This development was essentially a result of a greater understanding of God's revelation and thus theology was always in need of development and correction in the light of Scripture. While theology must build on the past, it must be directed to the present. He was, however, weary of attempts to adapt the gospel to suit the present context, insisting rather that the people in every context be adapted to the gospel..

The historical development of doctrine is not uniform but rather is characterised by periodic epochs of development. The Reformation and post-Reformation eras were the most notable epochs of advancement. If theology is to honour the work of the Spirit in the church it cannot ignore these periods but rather must build upon them. Thus while

greater development is to be expected, these epochs are a
landmark which, to some extent, will influence and
determine all later developments.

2.1.3 Cornelius Van Til

Cornelius van Til played a major role in shaping the
theological identity of Westminster Seminary. His
contribution was not, however, in terms of creative
systematic theology, for his basic assumption was the
substantial correctness of the theology of Reformed Ortho-
doxy. He expounded this theology as the system of doctrine
taught in the Bible.[12]   As such it is viewed as the most
consistent understanding of the Christian faith. [13] Van
Til's uniqueness is in the way he uses Reformed Orthodoxy to
develop his own epistemological approach and apologetic
method.

   Van Til argues that a particular philosophy or theology
is controlled by its underlying presupposition. The
apologist's task was, on the one hand, to uncover these
presuppositions, to demonstrate their incompatibility with
the Christian faith, and to show how they lead to absurdity
when taken to their logical conclusion. On the other hand
the apologist must self-consciously assume Christian
(Reformed) presuppositions, demonstrate how they provide
solutions to the major philosophical issues and, at the same
time, relate to the knowledge of God that all people have by
virtue of general revelation. Van Til called theologians to
exercise an epistemological vigilance in relation to their

philosophical and theological presuppositions.

Van Til's philosophy was essentially Reformed theology translated into philosophical categories and applied to major philosophical issues. Two major issues which Van Til attempted to deal with were the relationship between time and eternity, the creator and the creature; and that between the universal and the particular, the one and the many, fact and interpretation.

Van Til's epistemology rises out of his ontology, which understands reality as having two layers. The first layer is the self contained personal God who is ontologically distinct and separate from His creation by virtue of His incommunicable attributes. This God is the ontological Trinity in whom both the one and the many are equally ultimate. The second layer of reality is the created realm which is ontologically distinct from God, but metaphysically dependent upon Him. Human beings are created in the image of God and thus have an anological likeness to Him. Human beings fell in the historical rebellion of Adam when he asserted his autonomy over against God. Sin is an ethical separation between humanity and God which led to God's judgment on creation. Despite this ethical separation and God's judgment, humanity and the rest of creation remains metaphysically dependent on God for its existence. In the person of Christ, as defined by Chalcedon, creator and creation are united yet the ontological distinction remains.

God knows Himself perfectly and analytically, that is,

His knowledge is not obtained by reference to any thing outside of Himself. God knows all of reality by virtue of it being contained in His eternal decree which controls all things. In the eternal decree fact and interpretation find their correct relationship as the decree contains the God ordained interpretation of all facts. As God is a rational God so His decree, and therefore the meaning of all facts, is ultimately rational. This guarantees the possibility of true knowledge.

Human beings must interpret the facts of creation in accordance with God's original interpretation of them. Human knowledge is thus to be analogical to God's knowledge. It is not the same as God's knowledge but rather is like God's knowledge but in a creaturely manner. [14] Human knowledge is thus dependent on revelation.

Van Til insisted that all of reality is revelational in that it has its origin in the decree of God. Natural and special revelation are interdependent as the facts of natural revelation must be interpreted by special revelation. Special revelation, however, cannot be understood unless it is seen in relation to the facts of natural revelation. Scripture, however, retains its primacy in that natural revelation must be interpreted in terms of an authoritative and complete Scripture.

Scripture as the revelation of God provides the normative analogical knowledge of God. It is the truth and thus the criterion for evaluating all other truth claims. All human thought must be brought into subjection to the

truth of Scripture. While the Bible does not teach information on every dimension of life, there is no area of life which does not come under its authority, in that it speaks of God the creator and ruler of all things. Analogical thinking thus relates not only to the knowledge of God but to the knowledge of all things, for the universe can only be fully understood in relation to its Creator.

Sin originated in the refusal of human beings to re-interpret the universe in an analogical way. Human beings have rather claimed their own autonomy, interpreted the universe in terms of their own (or Satan's) norms, and then lived these out in rebellion against God. Sin affects every area of the human life. Unregenerate people are, in principle, totally evil, yet they display relative good. This is due to their having a knowledge of God from general revelation, and to the influence of common grace. Thus most of the unregenerate never have a consistently non-Christian understanding of reality. Christ came to overcome human rebellion and its affects. Regenerate people are thus, in principle, restored to a pre-fall condition and thus absolutely good, but in practice, are relatively evil due to sin remaining in their life. They do not therefore have a consistently Christian understanding of reality.

Van Til's apologetic and theological methodology relate closely to his epistemology. He proposed that all arguments are essentially circular and are determined by one's presuppositions. Christians must affirm as their basic presuppositions the self contained ontological Trinity and

the infallible Scriptures. Their beliefs cannot be argued
from "neutral" ground as there is no such thing. Human
reason can never be allowed to be the arbiter of the
truthfulness of these presuppositions, for to do so is to
give human beings autonomy to decide on what is truth. To
grant human beings this autonomy is a denial of these
presuppositions, as they are understood by Van Til. The
point of contact between the Christian and the non-
Christian is the fact that everyone knows God deep within
their personality, and sin is an attempt to deny this. The
Scriptures are self authenticating, and the witness of the
Spirit convinces people of the reasonableness of believing
them. Van Til is not a fideist in that he includes the use
of reason and of evidences for Christianity, as long as they
are used on the basis of Christian presuppositions.

Van Til 's contribution to theological methodology lies
in his understanding of analogical thinking. God's knowledge
of Himself and of reality is comprehensive and rational. His
revelation in Scripture is analogical to this. This means
that ultimately the various doctrines in Scripture cohere
closely with each other. These doctrines, even those which
seem to be in tension with one another, are in fact inter-
dependent upon each other. No doctrine can therefore be
denied or altered without affecting the others.

The ontological distinction between Creator and Creature
results in divine and human knowledge being qualitatively
different. Thus while God's knowledge is perfectly
systematic and rational, human analogical knowledge is not.

The consequence is that all theology is confronted with the problem of paradox and seeming contradiction. The theologian must therefore develop his theology from a detailed exegesis of Scripture, drawing out its logical conclusions. The issue of paradox only arises when two such developed doctrines come into contradiction with each other. The theologian must not look for paradox or contradiction where they are not necessitated by Scripture. A theological position is false when it contradicts what is demanded by Scripture without itself having an adequate Scriptural base.

Van Til's concept of analogical thinking de-absolutises theology. It insists that the Scriptures are far richer than any theological system; thus no system can claim to have all the truth. Further, as all systems are the product of reasoning affected by sin, they are all subject to error. Van Til himself tended to imply however that his own understanding was the scriptural system.

2.2 The Inerrancy of the Bible.

The Westminster tradition has placed a strong emphasis on the authority of the Bible. All voting members of the faculty are required to take an oath which affirms their commitment to the infallibility of the Bible and to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster confession and catechisms. It is this combination of emphases on classical Reformed theology and the infallibility of the Bible that has given Westminster its theological identity.[15]

The concept of inerrancy has been expounded in various

ways. In terms of G. Fackre's classification, the
understanding of inerrancy propounded by the Westminster
faculty is that of "intentional inerrancy" [16] Westminster
faculty members have drawn on the Old Princeton tradition
and combined it with Van Til's epistemology in articulating
their understanding. Moises Silva has proposed that this
doctrine has been misunderstood by many of its exponents as
well as its critics.[17] Drawing on the work of A.A. Hodge
and B.B. Warfield he affirms that all that the Bible teaches
is true and authoritative. The authors of the Bible were
children of their time and as such made use of the normal
literary conventions of their day, held the views of science
and history that were common and so forth. They used their
time-bound conventions and views to teach God's truth. Thus
inerrancy does not demand that every detail referred to in
the Bible is true.

This does not mean, however, that the truth content of
the Bible relates only to issues of faith and practice. It
relates to all the propositional truth that the authors
intended to teach whether it is religious, historical or
scientific. The issue of what the authors intended to teach
and what they incidentally used is an issue of exegesis and
not of inerrancy. [18] Exegesis will take note of the normal
use of ordinary language, the literary genre that is used,
the literary convention of the day and so on.

The Westminster approach to the doctrine of inerrancy
is the Old Princeton concept but replaces the Common Sense
Realism used by Machen with Van Til's epistemology. Van Til

insisted that all facts are interpreted facts and the Bible
is God's normative interpretation of the facts. Many of the
advocates and critics of inerrancy had assumed that
inerrancy demands a kind of historicism which views history
as the attempt to describe the brute facts of the past.
Biblical history is however, a theological interpretation of
the facts using the literary and historical conventions of
the time. What appears to twentieth century readers as
error is often a reflection of the combination of these two
factors. Van Til insisted that the Bible as the word of God
is the norm for all truth. As such, it is inappropriate to
evaluate it by modern, post-enlightenment concepts of
accuracy, facticity and truth, it must rather be understood
on its own terms. John Frame attempts to correct the
reductionism in much evangelicalism which relates the
authority of Scripture primarily to its inerrancy. Inerrancy
by definition only relates to propositional statements, yet
much of the Bible is not propositional. All Scripture as the
Word of God is authoritative, but how it is authoritative
will depend on the speech act a passage performs, its
literary genre and the content of the passage.

The New Westminster Theology proceeds from the pre-
supposition that the Bible is the authoritative word of God
and as such is truthful in all it affirms. The
characteristic of recent developments in the Westminster
tradition is that this presupposition has been built upon to
develop a creative understanding of the theological task.
Westminster Theology has moved from a defensive stance to a

creative one seeking to meet challenges of doing theology in the contemporary world.

Notes to Chapter II.

1 R.H. Balmer, <u>Mine Eyes have seen the Glory - A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America</u> (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 229.

2 Examples of this attitude can be seen in H.M. Conn, <u>Contemporary World Theology - A Layman's Guide</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

3 C.F.H.Henry, <u>God, Revelation and Authority</u>, 6 vols. (Waco, Word, 1976-1983).

4 D. Moody, <u>The Word of Truth - A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981), D. Bloesch, <u>Essentials of Evangelical Theology</u>, 2 vols. (San Francisco, Harper and Row 1978, 1979), M. Erickson, <u>Christian Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1985), and T.N. Finger, <u>Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach</u>, vol.1 (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1985).

5 R.K. Johnston, ed., <u>The Use of the Bible in Theology - Evangelical Options</u> (Atlanta, John Knox, 1985), J.J. Davis, <u>Foundations of Evangelical Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, 1988), C.H. Kraft, <u>Christianity in Culture - A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective</u> (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1979), Conn, <u>Eternal Word and Changing Worlds - Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Triologue</u> (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984), J.M. Frame, <u>The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988) and V.S. Poythress, <u>Symphonic Theology - The Validity of Multiple Perspectivesin Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987)

6 It is interesting to note that C.M. Gay's sociological analysis of the evangelical response to capitalism sees the divide between the evangelical left and the evangelical right as a result of factors very similar to those identified by R. Wuthnow as lying behind the divide between the conservative and liberal religion. See C.M. Gay, <u>With Liberty and Justice for Whom? The Recent Evangelical Debate over Capitalism</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991) and R. Wuthnow, <u>The Struggle for America's Soul. Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989). Unfortunately I was only able to obtain Gay's book in the final stage of writing this dissertation and was therefore unable to integrate his insights into the main body of the text.

7 W.A. Dyrness, <u>How does America Hear the Gospel?</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989).

8 J. Murray, "Systematic Theology", in <u>The Collected Writings of John Murray</u>, vol. 4: <u>Studies in Theology -</u>

<u>Reviews</u> (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 1.

9 Murray, p. 5.

10 Murray, "Charge to Edmund P. Clowney", in <u>The Collected Writings of John Murray</u>, vol. 1: <u>The Claims of Truth</u> (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 108.

11 Murray proposed that exegesis must be governed by biblical theology, understood as the historical unfolding of God's special revelation. This understanding of the nature biblical theology is dependant on the work of Geerhardus Vos, who was professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton from 1893-1932. The Systematic Theologians must thus first master exegesis and Biblical Theology before they can deal with Systematic Theology. Richard B. Gaffin, a student of Murray and the present professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster seminary in Philadelphia, has developed this concept further. He proposes that systematic theology is virtually indestinguishable from New Testament theology (understood in its relationship to the Old Testament). "Systematic Theology" should therefore be called "Biblical Theology". See R. B. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology", <u>Westminster Theological Journal</u> 38:3 (1976), 281-299.

12 While he insists that his position is the scriptural position he does not in most cases justify his statements exegetically. See G.C. Berkouwer's critique and Van Til's response in E.R. Geehan, ed., <u>Jerusalem and Athens - Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius van Til</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), pp. 197-204, and J.M. Frame's defence of Van Til in <u>Van Til the Theologian</u> (Chattanooga, Pilgrim, 1976), pp. 27 & 28.

13 Karl Barth refused to answer questions posed by Van Til on the grounds that Van Til was not open to learning anything new, having already decided what orthodoxy was. See J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevestandt eds., <u>Karl Barth - Letters 1961-1968</u>, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, T & T Clark 1981), pp. 7 & 8.

14 The exact nature of the distinction between God's knowledge and humanity's knowledge is debated by interpreter of Van Til. See Frame, <u>Van Til</u>, pp. 18-37 and <u>Knowledge of God</u>, pp. 20-40 and J. Hasley. "A Preliminary Critique of <u>Van Til : The Theologian</u>", <u>Westminster Theological Journal</u> 39:1, (1976) 120-136.

15 The emphasis on the Bible can be seen in the titles of three of the four books that have been produced as combined efforts by the Westminster Faculty. They are N.B.Stonehouse and P. Woolley, eds. <u>The Infallible Word- A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster</u>

Theological Seminary (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and
Reformed, 1978), J. H. Skilton, ed. Scripture and Confession
- A Book about Confession Old and New (Phillipsburg,
Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) and H. M. Conn, ed.,
Inerrancy and Hermeneutic - A Tradition, A Challenge, A
Debate (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988).

16 G. Fackre has identified three main types of
inerrancy namely: transmissive inerrancy, trajectory
inerrancy and intentional inerrancy. See G. Fackre, The
Christian Story - Authority : Scripture in the Church for
the World (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,1987) pp. 63-69. Vern S.
Poythress has distanced his position from the term
"intentional inerrancy" but his understanding of inerrancy
fits into this type. See "Problems for Limited Inerrancy"
in Evangelicals and Inerrancy edited by R. Youngblood
(Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 174-185. John Frame
would also disagree with the term due to his understanding
of the nature of meaning.

17 See M. Silva, " Old Princeton, Westminster and
Inerrancy". in Inerrancy and Hermeneutic. A Tradition, A
Challenge, A Debate, edited by H.M. Conn (Grand Rapids,
Baker, 1988), pp. 67-80

18 An example would be the issue of what does Genesis
one, or even Genesis one to eleven, teach? Is it an
historical and scientific account of the early history of
the earth, a parable, a saga or some other literary genre?
The issue must be decided by a careful exegesis of the
passage concerned in relation to other passages of Scripture
which relate to it. There has been considerable debat
amongst scholars connected to Westminster as to the meaning
of Genesis One. E.J. Young insisted that it taught a
creation in six literal days. M.G. Kline has attempted to
understand it as an account of creation set in a particular
literary framework whose goal is not to teach science but
rather to relate to issues raised by contemporary
cosmologies. As such it is not teaching scientific truth
which needs to be reconciled with modern science. E. J.
Young's son, Davis A. Young, has argued that from a
scientific point of view an interpretation of Genesis one to
eleven as recounting the early history of the earth is
untenable. The whole section must be interpreted within the
literary context of the Ancient Near East and not within
that of modern science. While Davis A. Young is not a
member of the Westminster faculty, he has served as a member
of the board of the Philadelphia Seminary and his discussion
was published in the Westminster Theological Journal. See
M.G. Kline, "Because it had not Rained", Westminster
Theological Journal 20:2 (1972),146-157. E.J. Young,
Studies in Genesis One (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and
Reformed, 1979), pp 43-105, and D.A. Young, "Scripture in
the Hands of a Geologist (Part 2)", Westminster Theological
Journal 49:2 (1987) 257-304

CHAPTER III AN EXPOSITION OF JOHN FRAME'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND
METHODOLOGY.

John Frame has developed a theological epistemology and
methodology which draws extensively, yet critically, on
the ideas of Cornelius van Til. This critical development
of Van Til's ideas takes place in interaction with
contemporary philosophy, notably, ordinary language
philosophy. Frame uses this epistemology to develop a
creative alternative to traditional models of theology.

Frames's theology is characterised by his concept of
"perspectivalism". [1] This is the conscious attempt to view
reality from different points of view, yet in such a way
that each point of view provides a perspective on all of
reality. The most dominant expression of this
perspectivalism is a series of interrelated perspectival
triads.

1. EPISTEMOLOGY.

1.1 The Objects of Knowledge.

Frame's concept of God as Covenant Lord is fundamental to
his understanding of theology. He derives his concept of
lordship from the use of the terms "Yahweh", "Adonai" and
"Kurios". He proposes that these titles are closely related
to the concept of the covenant. The covenant is the
agreement between the Lord and His servants whereby He
graciously chooses them to be His people, governs them by
His commands, blesses obedience and punishes disobedience.

In the Old Testament Israel was, and in the New, the church is, in a unique sense the covenant people of God. There is, however, a broader sense in which all creation is in covenant with God.

God's covenant activity is expressed in his three lordship attributes of control, presence and authority. God is in sovereign control of all things. This control is seen in his action of saving His people. God's authority is His right to demand absolute obedience, expressed in His commands. Presence or covenant solidarity is God's promise to be with His people in blessing and also in judgment. These three attributes act as perspectives on God's lordship and each one presupposes the others.

God reveals Himself through His Word. The Word is God's powerful and meaningful self expression. It is more than His revelation in that it refers not only to His communication with His creation, but also to His inter-trinitarian communication. The Word is to be understood as an attribute of God. When the Word is expressed towards the creation it takes on an accommodated and incarnated form. The Word has three functions which relate to the three lordship attributes. These are decree, address and presence. The Word-as-decree is God's control over His creation. All that happens is subject to the Word as sovereign ordering. The Word-as-address is the means by which He speaks to His creation. Human beings are called to submit their lives to God's address. The Word-as-presence is the means whereby the address of God takes root in a person by the work of the

Spirit so that they respond obediently to God with every aspect of their being. The Word-as-presence also serves to harden those who disobey the address of God.

God's revelation comes to humanity in a mediated form in the world, the self and God's law. [2] These three function as interrelated perspectives. As the Word is an attribute of God, knowing God involves knowing His law. This knowledge is an obedient knowledge and not a mere intellectual assent to propositions. God's law is revealed in nature, history, conscience and scripture. All human knowledge entails a knowledge of God's law. This knowledge is either a believing knowledge or an unbelieving knowledge.[3] Knowing and thinking are dimensions of practice and as such are subject to God's authority. While the law is revealed in the world and the self, it is primarily revealed in Scripture, which contains all the norms revealed in the rest of reality but also much more. Knowing God involves knowing the world, in that in knowing God, we know Him as the one who controls all things. All revelation comes through creative means and therefore God can only be known through the world. Obedience to God depends on a knowledge of the world, as the law of God can only be obeyed and understood [4] when its application to the contemporary situation is known. As the world is God's world it can only be truly known in relation to Him.

Knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are so interrelated that they are simultaneous. Human beings can only truly know themselves as created in the image of God,

yet fallen, and (in the case of the regenerate) saved.
They can only know God as they realise their creaturely
nature and servanthood. All human knowledge comes through
the human person and thus purely objective knowledge is an
impossibility.

The law, the world and self are thus also objects of
knowledge. The three objects are closely interrelated. All
knowledge, and thus all knowledge of the world, is subject
to God's law. The law cannot be understood or applied
without an understanding of the world; in fact, it is
meaningless without such an understanding. An understanding
of the situation in which scripture was written and of the
present situation to which you want to relate it, is
imperative for an understanding of what Scripture means.
Knowing the law involves knowing the world and vice versa.

The relationship between the self and the world must
lead to a re-evaluation of the relationship between fact and
interpretation. Following Van Til, Frame insists that all
facts have been interpreted by God and must be interpreted
in the light of God's revelation. There are no facts devoid
of interpretation. When human beings state facts they
interpret them so "that all statements of fact are
interpretations of reality and all true interpretations are
factual" [5] The determination of an adequate interpretation
of the facts and the determination of what are the facts are
the same process.

The law and the self, like the law and the world are
interrelated and can only be understood in relation to each

other. Yet the law relates to the self in an unique way due to the fact that human beings are created in the image of God and thus have the law inscribed within them.

This set of interrelationships can best be described as three perspectives of human knowledge. The normative perspective attempts to understand how scripture applies to the world and to the self. The situational perspective studies the world, accepting the biblical description of it to enable the individual to live (and to know) in a biblical manner. The existential perspective studies individuals as subjects created in God's image within the context of their situation and in the light of Scripture.

1.2 <u>The Knowing Subject.</u>

The self is both the object of knowledge and the knowing subject. Human knowledge of God and creation can never be the same as God's knowledge of Himself and the creation. Human knowledge is finite and incomplete. It is the knowledge of a servant and creature, while God's knowledge is that of the Creator and Lord. There are, however, some continuities between God's knowledge and human knowledge, thus assuring that true knowledge is possible. Human finiteness means that human knowledge of God is always faced with the reality of paradox and apparent contradiction. All human knowledge is subject to error, ignorance and mystery.

The knowledge of God is not a mere intellectual acceptance of certain facts, but is rather the response of the whole person in covenant relationship with God. It is a

knowledge of God as Lord and thus is related to the Lordship attributes.

Knowledge is thus subject to God's control and it is a product of grace. Objectively God chose to reveal Himself in Scripture; subjectively, human beings are dependent on the enlightenment and illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to receive, comprehend and correctly use the scriptures.

Knowledge is under the authority of God and thus is closely linked to obedience. True knowledge of God leads to obedience but true obedience leads to greater knowledge. It is incorrect to say that knowledge is prior to obedience or vice versa. Knowledge and obedience take place simultaneously and inseparably. Both are products of God's gracious action and, in some respects, they are synonymous. People's knowledge of God can be seen in their lifestyles.

If knowledge is to be an obedient knowledge it must be subject to Scripture. Scripture must act as a norm against which all knowledge must be tested. Human understanding of scripture is fallible and in need of correction. Such correction can only be made via a deeper understanding of Scripture.

The knowledge of God is a knowledge in the presence of God. It includes knowledge of facts about God and a knowledge of skills for right living, but ultimately it is the knowledge of a person. It is thus the personal involvement with God as a friend (or as an enemy in the case of unbelievers). All things are done, and thus all knowing is done "coram deo".

In summary ,"knowledge of God" essentially refers to a person's friendship (or enmity) with God. It therefore involves a covenantal response of the whole person to God in all areas of life, either in obedience or in disobedience. It involves most basically,. the "knowledge of God's lordship - of His control, His authority and His present reality." [6]

In Frame's understanding, all knowing is done in relation to God and all knowledge involves a knowledge of the world, the self and God's norms. This raises the issue of the knowledge claims of an unbeliever. As a result of general revelation and common grace the unbeliever does have a knowledge of God. The unbelievers interaction with God is, however, that of an enemy rather than a friend. The unbeliever thus consciously and unconsciously fights against the truth of God. The unbeliever thus knows and does not know.

1.3 The Justification of Knowledge.

Frame proposes that all human knowledge is a mixture of truth and error. In the believer sin remains present despite the effects of regeneration, so that while truth is dominant, error is present. In the unbeliever error is dominant, but truth is present due to common grace and general revelation. The theologian may therefore draw on the intellectual resources of christians and non-christians, but such data must be subject to justification in the light of God's lordship.

The justification of knowledge follows the triad of

norm, situation and self. Normative justification proposes that all reasoning is circular, that it is based on ultimate presuppositions or basic commitments, which can only be justified from within the system. Such circularity does not necessarily entail a vicious circularity, but rather ought to be argued in what Frame terms a broad circle, one which draws on other data interpreted in terms of the ultimate presuppositions.

The truth of Scripture is one of the ultimate presuppositions of Christianity, thus, all knowledge must be justified in terms of its coherence with Scripture. This justification might take the form of explicit biblical teaching, logical deductions from biblical teaching, applications of the Bible or a more general coherence with Scripture. This last category includes the understanding that the Bible commands Christians to seek the truth and live by it wherever it may be found. Sin, ignorance and limited knowledge results in many (but not all) theological formulations being somewhat tentative, relying on judgments of probability.

While all knowledge must be justified normatively, there is a hierarchy of norms. Norms in Scripture must take precedence over norms derived from nature. Even within Scripture there is a hierarchy of norms.

Knowledge is also justified situationally, that is, it must be justified by its correspondence with reality. By virtue of divine revelation a person has access to the real world. Knowledge must thus be related to the facts of

reality. These facts are always interpreted facts; from a Christian perspective they are interpreted by the spectacles of Scripture.

Knowledge must finally be justified existentially. The aim of justification of knowledge seeks not only to validate one's beliefs, but also to persuade others of their validity. Arguments may be completely logical, yet they will fail to persuade as there is an existential element to justification which cannot be reduced to logic. The process of persuasion is accompanied by what Frame describes as "cognitive rest". After a process of careful evaluation of data in the light of Scripture, the Christian comes to a position of deep satisfaction that the conclusion is one that can be lived with. This sense of "cognitive rest" is the result of the work of the Spirit. As knowledge and obedience are closely related, so knowledge is a product of sanctification. A growth in spirituality will lead to greater ability to make theological decisions.

A second dimension of existential justification that is the product of the work of the Spirit is what Frame describes as "seeing as". This is the sudden realisation of how Scripture relates to a particular issue or situation. It is a kind of "gestalt" switch whereby a person sees something that they never saw before.

Finally, Frame notes that within the church there is a kind of corporate existential justification. The sociology of knowledge has emphasised the effect of group dynamics in any understanding of truth. God has given the church a unique

corporate identity so that maturity in knowledge is attained together through the various gifts of the members. Thus theologising ought to take place within the context of the church.

These three dimensions of justification form three interrelating perspectives. They all view the same reality from different perspectives. No one is to be seen as ultimate but rather each one includes the others. Whilst Scripture is the ultimate authority, the normative perspective is not identifiable with Scripture, but rather views knowledge as the application of the Bible.

2.THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY.

2.1 The Nature and Task of Theology.

Frame develops his understanding of the nature of theology in contrast to the subjectivism of Schleiermacher and the objectivism of Charles Hodge. His objection to Schleiermacher is not that he viewed theology as the description of religious feeling, but that he proposed that religious feeling was the final authority and not Scripture.

Hodge describes theology as "the exhibition of the facts of Scripture in their proper order and relation with the principles or general truths involved in the facts themselves, and which pervade and harmonise the whole" [7] Frame criticises this definition in that it draws a strong parallel between theology and the natural sciences. Scripture is, however, not a collection of facts but is rather language. It describes facts but it interprets them

in terms of its own scheme. Furthermore, it is a strongly intellectualistic understanding of theology. Scripture is, however, not a list of propositions to be believed, but rather contains a wide variety of literary types which demand different responses. It implies that there is not a proper order within Scripture and thereby denigrates Scripture's perfection and normativity.

The task of theology is not to improve Scripture or give some kind of abstract statement of "the truth", but rather to use Scripture to meet human needs. Its task is to help people to understand and use God's truth. As such, theology is contextually specific. Theology is thus defined as "the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life." [8]

This understanding of theology flows out of the biblical commands to teach the truth. It frees theology from a narrow intellectualism and brings it into the domain of all the people of God. It can use academic methods and procedures but it is not required to do so. The use of data relating to the context and the individual person can, in fact must, be used in doing theology.

The key concept in the definition is that of "application". Frame proposes that this is to be defined as the New Testament's concept of teaching. As such it is directed towards the spiritual welfare of the people. This is not to imply that theology only has to do with a narrowly spiritual sphere, as Frame has insisted that it relates to "all areas of life". Theology is a covenantal activity and

thus relates to the whole of life lived under God's
lordship.

There is no dichotomy between meaning and application.
Frame, drawing on Wittgenstein, proposes that the meaning of
a term is its legitimate use. The meaning is discovered
by examining the task that is performed by the particular
piece of language.

Meaning is application in that a request for the
meaning indicates that the person does not know how to use a
piece of language. The aim of the questioner in discovering
the meaning is to use the language correctly. The meaning
of the Scripture is thus its legitimate use or application
within a particular context. To understand the Bible is to
be able to use it in new and changing contexts.

Frame rejects any concept of meaning that stands as a
mediator between the text and its application. Scripture
alone is the objective basis of theology and all steps
beyond it are applications, even if they are the highly
specialised applications of a Greek or Hebrew scholar. No
particular theological discipline can claim to supply "the
meaning" of the text that is distinct from the applications
and from the text itself.

2.2 Triperspectivalism

Theology as the application of Scripture can be seen to
include the triad of perspectives that Frame develops in his
epistemology. Theology is the application of Scripture
(normative perspective) to all areas of the life

(situational perspective) by people (existential perspective). These three dimensions are related perspectivally, with none having the priority.

Thus triperspectivalism does not destroy the "sola Scriptura" principle as none of the perspectives are to be equated with Scripture. The normative perspective is theology seen as the human (and thus fallible) application of Scripture and is not Scripture itself. The situational perspective flows out of an understanding of a situation which is interpreted in terms of Scripture. The existential perspectives view the person doing theology in terms of the demands of Scripture. These three cohere due to God's covenant lordship over reality.

2.2.1 The Normative Perspective.

The normative perspective deals with the way Scripture is used in theology, and thus the whole area of hermeneutics. As Scripture contains a wide variety of literary genres which perform different speech acts, it will function in a variety of ways in theology. Theology must use all of Scripture and not only the propositional content if it is to adequately teach the people of God. Scripture will play different roles in theology as various aspects of Scripture are applied, and used in different ways. Using David Kelsey's [9] analysis, Frame insists that the "sola scriptura" concept must govern the "data", the "warrants" and the "backing" in the process of theologising. This does not, however, exclude the use of extra-Biblical

information, but rather demands it.

The different theological disciplines (or programs, to use Frame's terminology) function as different ways of using Scripture. Exegetical theology focuses on particular texts, subjecting them to a detailed literary analysis. As such it looks at the text as an object of analysis. Exegetical theology functions as perspective on the whole of theology. As all theology seeks to discover the meaning of Scripture, there is a sense in which all theology is exegesis.

Biblical theology studies the history of redemption.[10] As such it looks through the biblical document to the history it tells in order to apply this history to human needs. It is valuable in that it enables people to grasp the depth and unity of God's revelation as it views the biblical drama moving to its culmination in Christ. While Frame makes use of a biblical theological method at times, he also stresses its limitations. It is only one perspective amongst others.[11]

Systematic theology seeks to apply the whole of Scripture to particular issues. In doing so it seeks to synthesise all the Scripture data relevant to the particular issue. While other disciplines implicitly pose the question of application, systematics proposes it explicitly. There is a mutual dependence between systematic, biblical and exegetical theology. The systematic theologian depends upon biblical and exegetical theology in order to understand the Scriptures better. Exegetical and biblical theologians need systematics to remain sensitive to the teaching of the whole of the Bible.

Frame has problems with the word "systematic" in the title Systematic Theology. In traditional Reformed theology, theologians attempted to construct a logical ordered and coherent "system of truth" out of the biblical data. This system was seen to be a setting out of the message of the Bible which was, as it were, hidded behind the text. The system functioned as the spectacles by which the Bible was interpreted and the norm against which orthodoxy was tested. Frame rejects this notion of a "system" which mediates between the Bible and the theologian. The Bible and the Bible alone must be authoritative. There is always the danger in systematics that the system acts as a grid which excludes biblical data.

"System" does play a role as the human understanding of the coherence of biblical teaching. No system can encompass the richness of the Bible and it is therefore necessary to use a multiplicity of perspectives. Redemption in Christ is the central message of Scripture, but it can be viewed from many different perspectives. Each perspective is a perspective on the whole of the biblical message viewed from a particular starting point. All perspectives will emphasise certain dimensions of the biblical message and neglect others. The use of another perspective will highlight those points which the first one obscured, leading to a greater comprehension of the richness of the Bible.

As the Bible is God's revelation to humanity, all its perspective cohere in principle. Thus part of the task of the systematic theologian is to demonstrate this coherence

by showing how the points highlighted in one perspective are related to another perspective which tends to obscure them. Human finiteness and sinfulness prevents the full comprehension of this coherence and leads to paradox in theology. Paradoxes need to be explored to show how each side relates to the other even when the paradox can not be resolved.

"Systems" attempt to relate various aspects of the biblical message to each other. This takes place at various levels from the relationship within a particular locus of theology to the construction of a greater whole. All "systems" must be subject to Scripture. They must not be seen as "the meaning" of Scripture. They are human and therefore fallible understandings of Scripture. As such, they must be seen as an essentially pedagogical structures which enable people to grasp what the whole of scripture has to say to a particular issue. The way various dimensions of theology are related to each other is thus often a point of pedagogy rather than theology. [12]

Practical theology is a subdivision of Systematic Theology that deals with the communication of the Word of God. It is not the practical discipline dealing with how the Bible is applied as all good theology is practical.

2.2.2 The Situational Perspective.

Frame's triperspectivalism and his understanding of theology as application not only make it legitimate to use data from other disciplines but rather demand it. This usage is

based on the proposition that all reality is revelational. As theology is defined as the application of scripture to all of life, it is impossible to do theology without a knowledge of reality.

The data that is drawn on from outside of the Scriptures must be interpreted in terms of Christian presuppositions and thus in terms of the Bible. The Bible is the norm of all truth. This does not mean, however, that human interpretations of the Bible are normative. Data drawn from other disciplines can cause the revision of a particular interpretation of what the Bible says. Such a revision can never be done only on the basis of that data, but must always be based on a careful exegesis of the text.

As the meaning of the Bible is its use, the meaning can only be known when data from outside the Bible is known. Development in theology is thus a result of discovering new applications of the Bible as the church is confronted with new issues. It is thus development in contextualisation. The "sola scriptura" principle is not compromised as this does not mean that only scripture may be used in theology, but rather, that scripture must govern the use of all data in the process of theologising.

Frame discusses a number of disciplines under the title of the situational perspective. These include the traditional dialogue partners of philosophy, logic, science and ancient near eastern history, the theological disciplines of church history and historical theology, and his own particular emphasis, language. [13]

Church history is the study of the process of the application of scripture to new contexts. It thus includes not only a study of the history of doctrine but also of the circumstances in which the development took place. As doctrine develops in relation to new contexts, so do the criteria of orthodoxy and heresy. New criteria for orthodoxy, that is, new creeds, are responses to new challenges.

The tradition of the church is important and plays a role in theology. Systematic Theology's focus should not, however, be primarily on the past but rather on the present. A focus on the past leads to a pre-occupation with old and irrelevant theological issues, models and methods. Theology must, however, make a critical use of tradition, always evaluating it under the normative authority of scripture and in the light of contemporary issues. As development in doctrine takes place by means of a "paradigm shift",[14] the data from the past will be incorporated in different ways in the new paradigm.

2.2.3 The Existential Perspective.

Frame insists that theology has an intensely personal nature. It expresses the theologian's deepest presuppositions and convictions and seeks to communicate these to others so that their lives might be transformed. All theology is governed by presuppositions but these arise from various sources such as emotion, reason, religious disposition, sensation, and so on. Thus the whole of the theologian's

life contributes to the theology that is produced. The knowledge that is gained through theology is thus a deeply personal knowledge of God. Theology can never be merely propositional, it must always be the expression of people who are responding to God with every aspect of their being.

Theology is inseparable from the character of the theologian. The biblical qualifications for teachers are primarily related to character. Theology must be characterised by a love for God and for others.

As theology is the response of the whole person to God, it involves the use of all of a person's faculties. These faculties ought not to be seen as separate entities in a hierarchical structure but rather as different perspectives on the whole person. Theology thus involves reason, "defined as the human ability or capacity for forming judgment and inferences"[15]. As such, theology is a process of drawing inferences from Scripture and making judgments on how it apples to reality. In a second sense, reason refers to correct inferences and judgments. In this sense theology has a responsibility to insure that its inferences and judgments drawn from Scripture do actually conform to Scripture. The science of logic seeks to analyse how the process of reasoning takes place, and to set rules by which the soundness of the process can be evaluated. Most reasoning, however, takes place without recourse to syllogisms, and the rules of logic cannot encompass all the processes of reasoning.

Theology also involves perception and experience.

Perception is the knowledge gained via the sense organs.
Experience includes perception, but it also includes
experience of something beyond the person, not gained via
the sense organs. Human beings never perceive or
experience brute facts. All data that is received is
interpreted by the human mind by a process of inference and
judgment. What is perceived and experienced is influenced
by what is expected. Experiencing something thus involves
reason. Reason is, however, dependent on experience for the
data that it uses. Reason and experience are thus mutually
dependent.

Experience plays an important role in relation to
theology in that the knowledge of God is determined by
growth in Christian spiritual maturity. Theology is thus
influenced by the life, struggles, failures, successes,
temptations, sufferings, sins, and so on, of the theologian.

Emotions also play a role in theologising. They are not
to be despised or subjected to reason, rather, they are to
be seen together with reason and other factors as a
contribution to the process of gaining true knowledge.
Reason will sometimes check and correct decisions or actions
that flow from an over-emphasis on emotion. Emotion, however,
will do the same for excessive rationalisation. An
emotional response will sometimes go against a carefully
worked out theory and thus ought to lead to a re-evaluation
of that theory. Emotions are physical and mental responses
to something, and, as such, are a means of gaining knowledge.

Emotions are subject to human finitude and sin and are

thus as fallible as any other dimension of the human personality. They, too are the subject of redemption, and it is thus the theologian's duty to cultivate godly emotions, such as a love for, and a joy in, what is good, and a hatred of sin. Scripture is full of emotive language and calls for an emotional response to its propositions.

Creative theology is dependent upon the use of a godly imagination. The interaction between Scripture, tradition and the contemporary situation require imagination and creativity in order to discover new ways of applying the Bible to new situations. Imagination also plays a role in the formation of theological concepts which, in turn, are corrected by Scripture.

The will is involved in the process of knowing, in that all knowing is dependent on choice, yet all choice is dependent on knowledge. Theology will thus constantly involve the will as theologians choose methods, interpretations, data to be used and so on. These choices will lead to the formation of habits and skills which form part of godly wisdom.

There is, finally, a mysterious dimension to knowledge, a dimension that is characterised by intuition. This is a knowledge of something which we cannot justify. As the human mind is finite, and an infinite process of reasoning is impossible, certain ultimate presuppositions must be chosen. These are known by intuition, they can be verified, but only in a circular argument.

The process of theologising thus cannot be separated

from the person of the theologian, but is rather an expression of the theologian's personality. All aspects of the person of the theologian must be subject to the normative authority of Scripture and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Theology grows and develops as greater certainty is gained with regard to aspects of Christian doctrine, that is, as more of the people of God come to a place of cognitive rest with regard to them.

Notes to Chapter III

1 Frame attributes his concept of perspectivalism to a number of influences in his life, most notably a number of teachers. Dennis O'Brien who taught him philosophy at Princeton, Cornelius Van Til and Paul Woolley at Westminster, and Paul Holmer and George Lindbeck at Yale. Personal correspondence 17.1.1991.

2 Frame rejects the traditional classification of revelation into general and special revelation preferring to classify it in terms of the media through which it is given. He identifies three broad categories of media. They are event media, word media and person media.

3 See below for the distinction between believing and unbelieving knowledge.

4 See section 2.1 below.

5 J.M. Frame, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), p. 72.

6 Frame, p. 48.

7 C. Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, n.d.) p. 19.

8 Frame, p 81. It is important to note that Frame is not proposing that this is the only correct definition of theology. There may be a number of valid definitions. See pp. 76 and 77.

9 See David Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1975). In his review of this book, Frame describes it as "possibly the most significant book on the subject since Warfield." J.M. Frame, "Review of D. Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology", Westminster Theological Journal 39:2 (1977), 328-353 (p. 329).

10 Frame here uses a slightly different definition of Biblical Theology to that used by Richard Gaffin and John Murray. They define it as the history of revelation (see Chapter 1, note 4). This means that some of Frame's comments about the limitations of Biblical Theology do not really apply to their understanding of it.

11 While he does not mention Gaffin's article (see Chapter 1, note 4), he seems to be reacting against those who, like Gaffin, would dissolve Systematic Theology into Biblical Theology or at least over emphasise it to the detriment of Systematic Theology.

12 Frame notes the following as examples. Infra- and

supra-lapsarianism, the "ordo solutis", and the issue of whether election is discussed as part of the doctrine of God or of salvation. See Frame, Knowledge of God, pp. 264-267.

13 We will only discuss Frame's understanding of church history here as it makes a contribution to the understanding of his concept of the task of Theology. While Frame notes the importance of relating theology to issues of economics, politics, history and so on, he does not include any discussion of these disciplines.

14 See T. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. International Encyclopedia of Unified Science Vol.2 No. 2 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970)

15 Frame, Knowledge of God, p. 329.

CHAPTER IV   A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ORIGINS AND USES OF

JOHN FRAME'S PROPOSALS.

Does Frame's epistemology and methodology provide

theological resources which enable the South African

evangelical theologian to do theology in a manner which

engages with the realities of the South African situation,

and yet remain true to their evangelical heritage?

In seeking to answer this question we will analyse

Frame's ideas, examining their roots and showing how they

have been used in different ways by people who have been

influenced by him. In particular, we will examine the work of

Vern Poythress with whom Frame has interacted extensively,

and that of Harvie Conn who has developed some of Frame's

and Poythress' ideas in ways which are particularly relevant

to the development of contextual evangelical theologies.

1. PERSPECTIVALISM.

A fundamental concept in Frame's approach to doing theology

is that of "Perspectivalism". Theologically,

perspectivalism is rooted in Van Til's understanding of the

Creator/creature distinction and the relationship between

fact and interpretation. Van Til insisted that all facts are

interpreted facts, that is there are no brute facts. God as

creator knows all facts and completely interrelates and

interprets them in His decree. Human knowledge is also an

interpretation of reality, but one which is finite and

subject to error. Frame's concept develops this and his

proposal of multi-perspectivalism is a way of overcoming

some of the limitations of individual human perspectives.

This does not, however, compromise the quantitative and

qualitative differences between human and divine knowledge.

It is, as such, a development of Van Til's concept of

anological thinking.

This concept is rooted in two ideas drawn from

Reformed Orthodoxy. The first is that of the divine decree

out of which all things originate. The second is the

distinction between "theologia archetypa" and "theologia

ectypa".[1] While it would be incorrect to see an identity

between Frame's concept of perspectivalism and the under-

standing of theological prolegomena in Reformed Orthodoxy,

the roots out of which Frame has developed his concepts lie

deep within the Reformed tradition. Frame's creativity is

seen in the way he has developed these ideas in dialogue

with contemporary philosophy and linguistics.

Frame (and Poythress) apply this concept of

perspectivalism to a number of areas, notably the whole

process of theologising various aspects of theology and the

scriptures. A perspectival approach can only be used if it

is assumed that the object being viewed has diversity which

is unified and inter-related in an organic cohesiveness. If

there is no diversity the issue of perspectivalism becomes

irrelevant. If the unity is not organically cohesive then

the one perspective cannot be expanded to view the whole

object. Frame, for example, rejects the possibility of

viewing the various steps in the "ordo salutis"

perspectivally. The various stages of the "ordo" are related as progressive steps and, as such, each step cannot be viewed as a perspective on the whole.

Not all perspectives are valid as the coherance and nature of the object limits such possibilities. To allow for all perspectives to be valid would lead to a complete relativism, which is rejected by both Frame and Poythress. At the same time the validity of multiple perspectives relativises the claim of one perspective to absolute truth. In terms of the creator/creature distinction, only God has absolute knowledge of all things. In terms of the authority of Scripture, only Scripture is supremely authoritative, and not human understandings of Scripture.

1.1 Triperspectivalism

1.1.1 The Origins of Triperspectivalism

The primary manifestation of perspectivalism in Frame's thought is what he terms "Triperspectivalism". This is a series of interrelated perspectival triads which dominate his epistemology and methodology.

These triads are not identical but are closely related and interrelated. They are all consequences of God's lordship attributes of control, authority and presence. These three attributes in turn are perspectives on God's covenant lordship, which is thus the organic coherence that provides the basis for the perspectival approach.

The unity and organic coherence of the lordship attributes arise out of the affirmation that God is "simple",

that is, not composed of many parts. Perhaps what is behind
Frame's idea is Van Til's insistance that in the Trinity,
the one and the many are equally ultimate. The unity of the
one God who is covenant Lord of His creation provides the
unity for the three perspectives of each triad. The Christian
therefore knows that the three perspectives cohere. As such,
one can proceed to theologise with confidence using all three
perspectives.

Frame's understanding brings together the classical
Reformed affirmations of God's decree which providentially
orders all things, the supreme authority of Scripture, and
the need for life to be lived "coram deo". They are brought
together in such a way as to show that they are mutually
dependent and imply each other. The underlying concept is
another charcteristic of Reformed theology, that of the
covenant. As such, Frame demonstrates that his theological
roots lie deep in the Reformed tradition. He also follows
what he perceives to be the challenge of Van Til's approach
to theology. That is, that ultimately all theology coheres
and that it is the task of systematics to demonstrate that
coherence. [2]

The roots of Frame's thought do not only lie deep in
Reformed Orthodoxy but something similar to Frame's
triperspectivalism is found in Calvin's theology, to which
Frame makes explicit reference. That is, the closely
intertwined nature of the knowledge of God and the knowledge
of ourselves. Timothy George describes this as follows:

"There is no proper knowledge of God which does not

involve self-understanding. Yet no one can know who he
really is without first looking upon God's face ... At
every step of the way and in every area of life, we are
confronted by a seeming contradiction. The knowledge of
ourselves drives us to look at God while it presupposes
that we have already contemplated Him."[3]

E.A. Dowey proposes further that in the light of
Calvin's view of humanity as a microcosm of the universe,
the knowledge of ourselves is a synechdoche for human
knowledge of creation as a whole. [4]   Thus all knowledge of
creation and ourselves involves the knowledge of God, and
all knowledge of God involves the knowledge of creation and
of ourselves. While Calvin does not explicitly theologise
in a triperspectival fashion, the dialectical relationship
between the knowledge of God, humanity and creation lies at
the heart of his theology.

Triperspectivalism draws together the categories of
general and special revelation. Classical Reformed theology
has always insisted that these two dimensions are
interrelated. The major thrust has been to view general
revelation through the spectacles of special revelation.
Van Til insisted that nature and Scripture were
interdependent so that they "are mutually meaningless
without one another and mutually fruitful when taken
together" [5]. Frame has developed this and done away with
the traditional two-fold distinction proposing rather his
triadic perspectival formulation.

While Frame's understanding of revelation moves beyond
the classical formula, his triadic epistemology is closely
related to some of the distinctives of that formula,

particularly as it was developed by Van Til. Thus the contextual and existential perspectives relate to the traditional category of nature, the normative perspective to scripture. Frame's dividing of nature into two categories merely develops Van Til's insistence on the role of the individual person as an interpreter of Scripture and nature. Here again, Frame's roots lie within the Reformed tradition, while his formulations are new and develop this tradition in new ways.

1.1.2 The Usefulness of Triperspectivalism

Frame's concept of triperspectivalism opens the way for numerous creative developments in theology.[6]

1.1.2.1 Carl Ellis : Evangelical Black Theology.

One particularly interesting use of Frame's concepts is that of Carl F. Ellis, Jr in his book Beyond Liberation - The Gospel in the Black Americal Experience. This is an attempt to interpret the history of the Afro-American struggle for freedom from the perspective of a Reformed evangelical. Ellis has to grapple with the failure of white evangelicals to support the struggle for freedom and the leadership role of church leaders such as Martin Luther King who are not usualy identified with evangelicalism, and that of non-Christians such as Malcolm X. It is Frame's triperspectival approach which enables him to do justice to these issues yet remain true to his evangelical roots.

Ellis uses a triperspectival approach to overcome the traditional evangelical opposition to those whose orthodoxy is in doubt. He notes that the white community tends to test Christian identity in a conceptual fashion, in terms of doctrine. The black church tends to use an existential test focusing on personal religious experience. The Bible adds a third, the situational, that is, the actualisation of the word of God in life and society. In the Bible this third perspective has a greater prominence. Evangelicals were more consistent in the conceptual area while Martin Luther King was more consistent in the situational area. Both are thus inconsistent and a third more full orbed approach which draws on the strengths of both groups is necessary.

Frame's triperspectivalism seems to lie behind Ellis's interpretation of Afro-American history even when he does not specificially allude to it. This is seen in his use of history and non-Christian sources, the Bible, and the "soul dynamic" of black religion and culture. His theology is a dynamic interplay of these three elements. Perhaps of particular significance is his use of the insights and life of Malcolm X, despite his obviously non-Christian stance. Ellis goes as far as to describe him as a "cultural prophet" [7] who exposed the sin of racism in American Christianity.

1.1.2.2 <u>Harvie Conn's Theory of Contextualization</u>.
Harvie Conn's discussion of contextualisation does not

deal explicitly with issues of epistemology[8] rather at key points in his discussion he refers to the work of Van Til and Frame. While he only briefly refers to Frame's triperspectivalism in the conclusion to <u>Eternal Word and Changing Worlds</u>[9] he proposes that theology functions within this triad. It would thus be legitimate to conclude that his broader discussion of the intradisciplinary nature of theology functions within the context of triperspectivalism.

Triperspectivalism enables him to draw upon linguistics, anthropology, and sociology as dialogue partners as he seeks to draw missions, theology and the social sciences into a dynamic engagement. In terms of Van Til and Frame's approach, he calls for a presuppositional critique of these disciplines in order that the use of them might not introduce non- or anti-Christian features which would subvert the theological enterprise.

An example of his approach can be seen in his socio-theological analysis of urban society as he seeks to promote the church's mission into the urban ghettos of the world.[10] Particularly enlightening is his use of sociological and theological tools to expose the evangelical churches individualistic view of sin and salvation, and thus their compromise with injustice and oppression. He then seeks to build a more corporate and social model of sin and redemption.[11]

1.1.3 <u>An Evaluation of Triperspectivalism.</u>

Triperspectivalism thus opens the way for more creative theological constructions, yet its roots lie deep within Reformed Orthodoxy, particularly as it was articulated by Cornelius Van Til. This relationship to Reformed Orthodoxy is both a strength and a weakness. A strength in that it enables people within this tradition to begin a process of engagement with the contemporary world, the weakness lies in the question of whether it is totally dependent upon Reformed Orthodoxy.

This weakness is particularly evident in that triperspectivalism depends upon the organic relationship of God's will as decree, God's revealed will and a person's existential experience. It is precisely here where Reformed Orthodoxy is problematic in relating God's decree to the reality of sin and of human responsibility. These issues are particularly pertinent when theology is done within the context of violence and oppression. Yet a triperspectival approach demands that the realities of context and personal experience should be part of the theologising process.

A second area of difficulty is in Frame's understanding of the nature of God's covenant Lordship as control, presence and authority.

These concepts need to be defined in accordance with the character of God. The recurring theme that Yahweh is a God of justice who liberates the oppressed Israelite slave is absent from Frame's analysis of God's Lordship. There is a need to correlate the Lordship attributes with Abraham Kuyper's description of God-in-Christ as one who "never

takes his place with the wealthier but always stands with the poorer".[12]

While it needs to be affirmed that there is more to the character of God than His commitment to justice for the oppressed, in a world and a country characterised by injustice and oppression, this dimension of God's character needs to be emphasised. It is this failure which prevents Frame from emphasising the knowing God is closely related to the doing of justice. Frame would probably want to affirm this, but would see it as only one dimension of covenant obedience. In South Africa it is often those who insist most strongly on obedience to the covenant law of God who have advocated and implemented policies which benefit the rich and powerful and deny justice to the poor and oppressed.[13]

1.2 "System" and Multiperspectivalism.

In developing the concept of multiperspectivalism it is important to note that there is considerable interaction and mutual dependency in the thought of Frame and Poythress. This makes it difficult to isolate what is their unique contribution. [14] For the purpose of this section I will examine their contributions together.

1.2.1 Origins of Frame's Understanding of System and Multiperspectivalism.

Frame's understanding of "system" and multiperspect-ivalism must be seen in comparison and contrast with the

concept of "system" in traditional Reformed theology.[15]

Both the views have their roots in the distinction between "Theologia Archetypa" and "Theologia Ectypa".[16] The Reformed scholastics held that "Theologia Ectypa" was to be found in a number of forms. These include the system of truth that is taught infallibly in Scripture and is in fallible human theologies. Traditional Reformed theology viewed theology as the fallible attempt to set out the system of truth taught in the Bible as accurately as possible.[17] The assumption that lies behind this is that, because God has a perfectly coherent and integrated knowledge of Himself and all of reality, He must have revealed such a coherent and integrated system in the Bible. The theologian must exegete the Bible and then create a system which integrates the data derived from the exegesis using the tools of logic and philosophy. The development of doctrines takes place as theologians gain greater insight into the revealed system of truth.

Frame and Poythress thus have developed the distinction between "theologia archetypa" and "theologia ectypa" in a different way, making use of concepts expounded by Van Til.

Van Til emphasised the creator-creature distinction in the area of knowledge and insisted that all human thought about God must be analogical. Scripture and Scripture alone is the normative analogical knowledge. Frame uses this concept to reject any concept of a "system of truth" which lies behind the Biblical text as the "meaning" of the Bible. Scripture itself makes use of a number of complementary

perspectives which cannot be reduced to a neat system, for example, the four gospels accounts of Jesus life. If Scripture as the normative analogical knowledge of God makes use of multiple perspectives, then theology must do the same.

Van Til's approach to theology emphasised both the coherence of theology and the inevitability of paradox. Van Til used his notion of the coherence and interdependence of theology to insist that orthodox Reformed theology is the only true system of theology and any deviation compromises the whole and is to be rejected. Frame and Poythress have drawn on this to emphasise that no one human system can comprehend the riches of scripture. God alone has a comprehensive system, yet even with God's perspective, there is unity and diversity, for God is Trinity. This is not, however, to deny that the different aspects of biblical teaching cohere. It is rather to affirm that the unity and diversity of biblical teaching is not reducible to one perspective. The coherence and unity of biblical teaching means that it is possible to view it perspectivally. Its richness and diversity makes such an approach necessary.

This concept of multiperspectivalism differs from Van Til's in that Frame and Poythress have combined their understanding of the coherence of theology with a recognition that the Spirit of God is at work in other Christian traditions. As such, these traditions will include valid perspectives on theology which need to be incorporated to create a richer and fuller understanding

of God's revelation.

The concept of perspectivalism has been developed in dialogue with linguistics and with Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Of major importance is the nature of meaning. Traditional Reformed theology has tended to see the meaning of Scripture as the system of doctrine it contains. It has also tended to see Scripture, particularly the New Testament epistles, as using terminology with technically specific meanings.

Poythress drawing on the linguistic theory of Kenneth L. Pike, has emphasised the richness of meaning conveyed in any particular discourse.[18] This richness of meaning arises out of the interaction between the authors and their context, the discourse and its context, and the original recipients and their context. Each of these function as perspectives on the meaning of the whole text. The perspective of the author, the discourse and the recipients mutually enrich each other and enable the interpreter to come to a better understanding of the fullness of meaning conveyed in the text. This understanding of meaning must be seen against the background of the understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. God has prepared the writers' personalities and characters, He inspires the writing and controls the circumstances of its being received. The various perspectives on the meaning of the particular text find their unity in the divine purpose. Thus meaning does not rest in human language but in God who inspired the text.[19]

A second linguistic factor of importance regards the nature of the terminology used by the biblical writers. While some of the religious terminology has a technical meaning, most of the terms do not – rather it is ordinary language that is used in a theological context. Different authors will use the same terms in different ways. It is illegitimate to read back into the them the technical meanings that these terms were given over the centuries of theological development. Even when the religious terms have technical meanings, these are not always to be identified with the meanings given to them in later theology. Ordinary language has a richness which technical terminology does not have. More than this, the various biblical authors will describe the same reality in different ways, using different sets of terminology. Each of these sets of terms highlights different aspects of that reality. This applies to events and persons such as the exodus or the ministry of Jesus, as well as to religious concepts such as salvation or judgment.

These factors are combined with Wittgenstein's understanding of meaning as use,[20] and result in a rejection of the attempt to see a system of truth behind the Bible as the meaning of the Bible. The meaning of the Bible is varied and rich, yet coherent. This coherence is best comprehended by viewing the Bible perspectivally rather than in terms of a system of truth behind the text.

1.2.2 Perspectives, Systems and the Bible.

Frame proposes that issues of theological system and order

are often matters of pedagogy, not theology. Issues that the scholastics dealt with by means of the concept of logical order are dealt with in a perspectival fashion. No one particular ordering of theological topics is necessarily correct as different systems are often different perspectives of the same reality. Each system is, however, a fallible construct containing legitimate and illegitimate understandings of the coherence of Scripture. Thus there are situations where issues of system involve issues of theology.

Frame's exposition of the concept of system is ambiguous at this point. He recognises that issues of system are sometimes issues of theology yet he does not define his criteria for determining this.

The ambiguity is most obvious in his discussion of medical ethics where he affirms that "biblical principles are part of a system of law."[21] This understanding enables him to give priority to certain commands which can and must be obeyed at the expense of others where there is an apparent conflict of duties. The difficulty is that while there are biblical passages that give priority to certain commands, nowhere does the Bible set out a system of ethics. To construct such a system one has to draw on passages from a wide variety of places in the Bible. It thus remains a human understanding of the coherence of the Bible. Yet his use of the concept of system suggests something similar to an understanding of meaning as something which lies behind the text.

Frame uses this concept of perspectivalism to advocate an evangelical ecumenism.[22] While maintaining an understanding that "the Reformed faith is the most consistently scriptural system of doctrine yet devised"[23] he recognises that it is not perfect and that other traditions have valid theological perspectives. It is important to draw on these, developing a theology which is true to Scripture. Frame has issued a passionate call for organisational unity of evangelical churches. While this call is not only based on a perspectival approach to theology, this does form an important part of it. The perspectival approach enables Frame and Poythress to move beyond denominational and party polemics towards a greater appreciation of different theological approaches, even when they are critical of them.

The use of perspectivalism in the above cases results in the relativising of theology in order to emphasise and serve the normative authority of scripture. It is a rejection of any attempt to set up a canon within the canon or to use a theological system as a grid through which the Bible is read. Thus it is a development of the "sola scriptura" principle in which all traditions (including the Reformed tradition) are subjected to the Bible. This characteristic is the outworking of Van Til's emphasis on the supreme authority of Scripture. The consequence of this is that while many areas of Christian doctrine are open to re-evaluation in the light of a perspectival approach, the supreme authority and truthfulness of Scripture is not.

Frame thus rejects any attempt to attain unity with those he perceives as denying this principle, what he terms the liberals and neo-orthodox. Here Frame's theology stands in direct continuity with the Westminster tradition in general, and Van Til in particular. This does not, however, mean that people holding liberal views have no valid perspectives on the truth but it does mean that these perspectives are distorted by their theological presuppositions.

The perspectival approach to theology opens the way for making use of insights drawn from those with whom one has major theological disagreements. Poythress has used it in his analysis of dispensationalism (which over emphasises the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments) and Theonomy (which over emphasises the unity of the testaments). In doing so, he seeks to draw on their valid ideas and incorporates them into his own theology. Conn's interaction with Liberation Theology[24] shows the same features, although he does not explicitly refer to perspectivalism. He examines Liberation theologies in the light of the Bible and then integrates the ideas drawn from Liberation Theology with the Reformed tradition.

A perspectival approach enables conservative Reformed theologians to move away from an understanding of the task of theology to create new and more perfect systems. It enables them to grapple with new and relevant issues, seeing them as a perspective through which the whole of the Bible can be viewed. While it argues for the validity and necessity of other complimentary perspectives, it validates

theologies which could otherwise be seen as reductionism.

Conn draws on this approach in his approach to
contextualisation, [25] arguing that theologies produced in
response to non-Western agendas are valid perspectives on
theology. They need to be seen as complementary to (and
corrections of) Western theologies. Both need to be
integrated into a symphonic theology, a theology which,
while not reducible to a logical system, forms a coherent
and complementary understanding of the biblical message.

1.2.3 Perspectives and Hermeneutics
Poythress has developed a multi-perspectival approach to
hermeneutics. Individual passages can be viewed from the
perspective of the author, the discourse and the readers.
When dealing with a text which records an event, one asks
similar questions about what was taking place at that time.
When one examines the discourse itself one can examine
it from a number of different perspectives in terms of
issues that are raised by the text. This opens the way for
new and creative readings of the Bible. This is not to say
that all interpretations are valid as the text itself limits
the possibilities.

Poythress develops the perspectival approach to
hermeneutics further by entering into dialogue with Thomas
Kuhn's paradigm theory.[26] He argues that the exegesis of
particular passages is to some extent determined by the
theological or methodological paradigm that is used. The
concept of paradigm is another way of viewing the concept of

perspective. The paradigmatic nature of hermeneutics explains why exegetes making use of different paradigms will interpret passages in radically different ways. The same data will be interpreted in accordance with the paradigm used. What traditional historical critical scholarship sees as evidence for different sources, some of the newer literary methods see as evidence of the author or redactor's literary style. This paradigmatic difference hinders communication between scholars using different methods.

Paradigms function at different levels. At the most basic level there are differences of world view. These issues revolve around the nature of God, the universe, humanity and revelation. Poythress argues that at this level Christians are called to accept the world view taught in the Bible. This reflects Van Til's understanding of presuppositions. At another level, paradigms function as theological traditions and exegetical methodologies. These in turn give rise to certain standard interpretations of biblical texts. In the latter two areas Poythress argues that there is often a place for a multiperspectival approach.

Poythress proposes that in areas of exegetical controversy there is ultimately one legitimate interpretation. However, an awareness of how exegesis is determined by paradigms enables the exegetes to evaluate critically their own interpretation and that of others. This awareness includes the recognition that the paradigm is not only framed by theological considerations, but also by

existential, contextual and social dynamics.

1.2.4 <u>An Evaluation of Multiperspectivalism</u>.

The multiperspectival approach demonstrates how a theo-
logical method deeply rooted in Reformed Orthodoxy can be
used to develop creative alternatives to traditional
approaches. It has opened the way for greater creativity in
evangelical systematics by relativising theological systems
in the interest of emphasising the authority of the Bible.
It thus liberates evangelical theology from the barren
repetition of past systems, yet it is not without its
weaknesses.

The first area of difficulty arises around the concept
of "systems". "System" as the human understanding of the
coherence of scripture is sometimes more than an issue of
pedagogy. It has a major theological impact as seen in
Frame's discussion of "system" in ethics, and his holding to
the Reformed tradition as the most consistently biblical
system of theology. Frame does not, however, give clear
guidelines as to when issues about theological systems are
to be judged to be issues of pedagogy or of theology. He
would probably argue that it is an issue of theology when it
is demanded by a consistent exegesis of the Bible. Yet
Poythress argues that differences of system affect, and may
determine, the results of exegesis. I would also suggest
that issues he regards as issues of pedagogy, such as the
relationship of the place of election in the theological
system, may have a theological impact. It is possible that

Frame's understanding of issues of system as issues of pedagogy reflects an aversion to theoretical issues arising out of American pragmatism.Further clarification is necessary in this area as the present formulation obscures the effect that differences in system have on important theological issues.

A second issue is whether the concentration on the use of perspectives to comprehend the issue of unity and diversity in the Bible and theology does not sometimes lead to a flattening out of some distinctions and diversities. Frame and Poythress propose that a particular theme and idea can be expanded to become a perspective on the whole of the Bible or the subject at hand. Whilst this expanding of the perspective does provide new insights, it obscures legitimate differentiation and distinction.

Frame's discussion of the theological sub-disciplines demonstrates this. He describes each sub-discipline as a perspective on the whole of theology. Thus all of theology can be seen as exegesis, as all of theology is involved in interpreting Scripture. This fails to draw the legitimate distinction between exegesis as the interpretation of what the text meant originally, as opposed to what it meant later in history, or what it means today.

While a conservative evangelical understanding of the Bible rules out the legitimacy of seeing certain types of diversity in the Bible, it does allow for considerable diversity. This diversity can not only be reduced to an issue of perspectives, but includes complementary themes

which cannot be reduced to each other or expanded as perspectives of the whole. There are contextual differences as authors use themes and ideas in different ways. Frame and Poythress acknowledge this but see these as issues of perspective. Finally, there are polar differences. Some of these can be reduced to perspectival differences, others cannot. In most cases a perspectival approach is useful, but a reduction of the diversity to one of perspectives will lead to distortion. These polarities include creator and creature, law and grace and creation and redemption.

Multi-perspectivalism is thus a helpful methodological approach but it needs clarification in terms of the nature of systems in theology. It needs to be complemented by other approaches to prevent all distinctions and diversities being reduced to issues of perspective.

2. MEANING AS USE AND THEOLOGY AS APPLICATION

2.1 The Origin of Frame's Definition.

Frame's definition of theology is "the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life".[27] This is contrary to the tendency in Reformed Orthodoxy to define theology as the setting out of a system of truth. The understanding that theology has a deeply practical purpose has deep roots in the Reformed tradition. Calvin insisted that theology must be useful and aimed at the upbuilding of the people of God. Reformed Orthodoxy, despite its scholasticism, also proposed that theology had a practical goal. Frame's definition attempts to bring this practical

goal to the forefront of the theologising process.

This definition has its roots in the concept of the covenant and in Frame's covenant epistemology. The Christian is one who is in covenant relationship with God. As such, the whole of his life must be lived in obedience to God, the covenant Lord. The task of theology is thus to enable the Christian to live all his life to the glory of God. The concept of the covenant is deeply rooted in the Reformed tradition. Frame's definition draws on biblical theological research which understands the covenant as the relationship between the covenant Suzerain and his people.[28] As such it relates to the whole of life lived in relationship with God. Theology as a covenantal discipline cannot be merely intellectual, but must equip the people of God to enable them to perform their covenant responsibilities. Covenant faithfulness in the Bible is judged more by obedience, than by intellectual assent to propositions.

A second theological root of Frame's approach lies in Van Til's insistence on the supreme authority of Scripture. Scripture as the word of the covenant Lord is truth. It must stand as the supreme norm of thinking and acting. Frame interprets this to mean that theology must never be seen to be in competition with Scripture. The task of theology can therefore not be to search for the meaning of Scripture as something that lies behind the text as a system of truth. Nor can it be seen to imply that there are material or other defects in Scripture. Its aim must be to enable people better to understand and use Scripture. This

use of Scripture is always related to the practical aim of covenant obedience.

It is possible that Frame has been influenced by Paul Holmer's understanding of theology as the "grammar of faith"[29] which is directed towards the spiritual life of the individual. The task of theology is to bring the gospel to a person so that it meets their needs and desires.

Another possible influence on Frame's thought is the pragmatism that is characteristic of American culture and philosophy.

Frame's definition is also largely dependent on his understanding of the nature of meaning. He draws on the work of Wittgenstein and others to assert that the meaning of a statement is its legitimate use. The meaning of a statement is found by discovering what function it performs. A request for the meaning of a piece of language is an expression of one's inability to use the language concerned. It is asking how that piece of language can be applied to a particular situation. The meaning of a statement is thus its legitimate application.

Frame combines this understanding of meaning with Van Til's insistence on the supreme authority of Scripture, and his covenantal epistemology to define theology as the legitimate application of Scripture. As such, Frame rejects any dichotomy between the meaning of Scripture and its application.

2.2 The Usefulness of Frame's Definition

Frame's definition demands that extra-scriptural data be used in the process of theologising. While triperspectivalism makes interdisciplinary dialogue possible, theology as application demands that theology be done in dialogue with other disciplines. If Systematic Theology is to relate to all dimensions of life it must engage in dialogue with disciplines such as sociology, law, anthropology and economics.

If theology is the application of scripture to all areas of life, it is not limited to the work of the academic. Rather it is the work of all the people of God as they seek to serve God in all areas of life. Theology thus includes the insight and perception of the ordinary person.

If theology is application, then all of theology is a contextualisation or attempt to address issues raised by a particular set of circumstances and does not seek to set out God's truth for all time. We do not know the meaning of the text if we do not know how it relates to contemporary issues and situations. This understanding is combined with perspectivalism to allow for the development of creative contextual theologies which can view the whole of the scriptural message from the perspective of contemporary issues. As such, theology fails to be theology when it fails to address contemporary issues.

2.2.1 Harvie Conn's Theory of Contextualisation.
Harvie Conn has developed these ideas in relation to the contemporary debate about contextual and liberation

theologies.[30] He does this in three ways. Firstly, he uses it to critique the traditional dichotomy between exegesis and application. He proposes that this is particularly problematic when exegesis emphasises linguistic data and fails to deal with how the text functioned in its particular socio-historical context. If meaning is use, exegetes need to pay much closer attention to the original socio-historical context and show how this relates to contemporary contexts. The meaning of the text is its application to contemporary issues.

Secondly, he uses it to critique the idea that the theologian first abstracts an objective doctrine from the Bible and then, as a second step, contextualises it in relation to a particular set of circumstances. This approach is particularly problematic when Western evangelical theology is viewed as objective doctrine by which non-Western theologies must be evaluated. All theology is contextual and is subject to the dangers inherent in that process. Western theology has been distorted by its context. Theologians need to theologise in a self-consciously contextual manner.

Thirdly, he uses it to overcome a hermeneutic which propounds a dualism between theology and praxis. Theology is rather part of the covenant response of the people of God. Truth is not abstract intellectual propositions but covenant fidelity. As such it includes prepositional truth, but is much more. God is constantly faithful to His covenant and calls His people to respond in covenant

faithfulness. Contextualisation is not merely an attempt to communicate the propositions and demands of the gospel in a meaningful form to a different culture but rather "the process of the covenant conscientization of the whole people of God to the hermeneutical obligations of the gospel". It seeks to ask

> "How shall the child of God, as a member of the body. of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit, respond with integrity to the scriptures in his or her culture in order to be able to live a full-orbed kingdom lifestyle in covenant obedience with the covenant community."[31]

Theologising becomes involvement in the dialects of correct theory and correct practice.

2.3 An Evaluation of Theology as Application.

Theology as application, particularly as it is expounded by Frame, has two major problem areas. The first is the relationship between meaning then and meaning now - that is, the issue of hermeneutics. We will discuss this in the section below. The second is that Frame tends to downplay the importance of the historical formulations of some doctrines. This difficulty is aggravated by his tendency to regard issues of system as essentially issues of pedagogy. This problem is not inherent in the method but possibly reflects Frame's own interests. A careful analysis of the history of dogma should lead to greater appreciation of the contextual formulation of theology. Such an awareness would also serve as a guide and a corrective to future contextualizations of theology.

A third area of difficulty which has been raised by
M. W. Karlsberg is the relationship between theology in the
Bible to theology after the Bible.[32] Does Frame's proposal
limit theology to a post-canonical activity? This is, in
many ways, a pseudo problem. Both Frame[33] and Poythress[34]
note the occasional characteristic of Paul's writing which
displays him using his understanding of the gospel to meet
the needs of new and different situations. Paul's theology
thus develops as he applies the gospel he received on the
Damascus road to the challenges faced by the churches of the
first century. As such, it is a dynamic contextual
theology. This same idea applies to much of the biblical
material. While God does progressively reveal Himself and
the Bible records that revelation, it is also the
application of that revelation to the original and to new
contexts. Theology both within Scripture and outside of
Scripture is thus the application of revelation to a
specific context.

3. <u>MEANING THEN AND MEANING NOW</u> - <u>THE ISSUE OF HERMENEUTICS.</u>
If meaning is defined as the legitimate use of a piece of
language then meaning is context specific. When the same
piece of language is used by a different person and
different context the meaning will be different.   Even if
the same person uses the same piece of language in a
different context the meaning will be different.[35] If
theology is the legitimate use of Scripture we are forced to
deal with the issue of how does the contemporary use of

scripture (and thus its meaning today) relate to its original use? Failure to deal with this issue will result in either opening the biblical text to any use and thus vacating the concept of the authority of Scriptureof all meaning, or of so confining the meaning of Scripture to the original context that one is unable to address the pressing needs of today.

3.1 <u>The Hermeneutics of John Frame and Vern Poythress.</u>
Frame argues that a text can be used for any purpose to which it is suited, but he does not expound what he means by this. Nor does he explain how a contemporary use that is suited to a passage relates to the original use. He rather grounds the contemporary usage in the dual authorship of the Bible, proposing that all the uses for which a text is suited are the uses intended by God, the ultimate author.

Frame 's approach to the application of biblical commandments is more helpful. He proposes that a careful exegesis of the command must determine its meaning in the original context to discover its function then. To the extent that the situation is the same today, it can be applied literally. When the context is different the law still applies – the difference in context will lead to different applications. Frame does not expand on how this change should take place. When using Old Testament material, redemptive historical differences need to be analysed as well.

For Frame the application of scripture is often more of an art than a science. As such, the biblical data functions

as a kind of pattern or analogy. Contemporary situations
must be viewed in terms of these patterns so that they can
be described and evaluated by the biblical data. This
process of moral discernment cannot be reduced to a set of
rules. People with the same set of data in front of them
will see a situation differently and thus apply the Bible
differently. Frame proposes that failure to see the pattern
is often a result of spiritual immaturity. Interpretation
must thus take place within the context of Christian praxis.

Poythress' approach is similar, though he expounds it
in more detail. He, too, grounds his approach in the dual
authorship of Scripture, arguing that both authors (God and
the human writer) point to each other and demand that each
one be taken seriously. This means the text must be read in
the context of progressive revelation. He proposes that the
text must firstly be understood in its original context.
Secondly, it is to be understood in relation to previous
revelation, and finally, in terms of the entire canon. This
third stage can be subdivided as well. In this third stage
an attempt is made to see not only how the text relates to
the rest of the canon, but also how it is used in the rest
of the canon. In so doing it seeks to show the relationship
between the canonical meaning and the original meaning.

The canonical meaning is at the same time, a
christological meaning, in the sense that progressive
revelation reaches its climax in Christ. This
christological interpretation must not function to exclude
parts of the biblical canon as the identity of Christ is

determined by the whole canon. Nor is it necessarily read back into the intention of the original author, but is rather seen to rise out of the original meaning as it relates to the canonical meaning.

Poythress further proposes that contemporary applications that are in accord with the Bible are part of God's intention and thus part of the meaning. To apply the Bible today, texts must be exegeted in their original context and then in their canonical context, seeing how they are fulfilled in Christ. Only once it is seen how a text relates to Christ can it be applied today. Here again, differences in socio-cultural conditions must be taken into account. Thus a literal application might be impossible. Once it is understood what the text does in its context, then the principle which relates to the present context can be seen and applied.

This approach does not adequately deal with the hermeneutical gap between the text and the contemporary world. This failure is aggravated by Frame's tendency to ask questions of the Bible that lie outside the focus of its teaching. This, in turn, is combined with an idealistic understanding of the Bible that has not wrestled seriously enough with the accommodated nature of biblical revelation. The result is a tendency to absolutise dimensions of the socio-historical context, rather than seeing them as contexts into which God speaks. An example of this is seen in Frame's discussion of the nature of the state, [36] in which he attempts to demonstrate that the state is an extension of

the family. The argument revolves around the fact that initial references in the Bible to statelike authority relate to family or tribal groupings. This, however, demonstrates no more than that the statelike authority in those particular socio-cultural conditions were family or tribal groupings.

A related issue is the cultural relatedness of the biblical documents. While Frame and Poythress recognise this, they tend only to bring it into consideration when there is obvious dissonance between the original context and the contemporary situation. It is difficult to analyse why at times they argue that a particular command is shaped by the context and thus not directly applicable, and why at other times, they absolutise the context. In this area there is a need for careful consideration of the nature of scripture, as accommodated revelation and its relationship to theology. [37]

3.2 The Hermeneutics of Harvie Conn and David Clowney.

Harvie Conn and David Clowney [38] draw on the work of Frame and Poythress but their approach demonstrates an important hermeneutical shift. This hermeneutical shift in turn leads to different applications of the Bible to important contemporary issues, notably those raised by the feminist movement.

Conn's hermeneutic calls for a dynamic engagement in a hermeneutical spiral in which the interpreter not only addresses the Bible, but at the same time, the Bible

addresses them. The result is that the interpreter and his questions and presuppositions are challenged, leading to a new obedience. This, in turn, raises new questions and the process continues.

This approach is governed by his understanding of the nature of biblical revelation. This revelation is a progressive revelation in which the message is gradually unfolded and finds its culmination in the eschatological restoration of creation. This progressive revelation is accommodated to the socio-cultural conditions in which it is given. These conditions are sometimes violations of God's design for humanity. So, in the Old Testament practices like polygamy are tolerated and laws are given to regulate it despite the divine intention of monogamy. In the New Testament this accommodation revolves around the concept of "offence". The overriding desire is that people be confronted with the offence of the cross, thus other unnecessary offences must be avoided. Thus Christians sacrifice their liberty in order to present the essential offence of the gospel. The result is that the New Testament often commended practices which are less than the eschatological ideal.

The accommodation never totally obscures the divine intention but is rather "accompanied by a divine eschatological polemic against culture, pointing to Christ as the transformer, the re-possessor of our social settings".[39] This eschatological demand stands ahead of all socio-cultural settings calling them to true righteousness, justice

and liberation. Yet in order to communicate it must remain
in contact with the socio-cultural context. The eschato-
logical history of redemption includes contemporary
Christians. They are always called to be beyond their socio-
cultural environments in working out the eschatological
ideals.

While the Bible is accommodated to culture it
communicates God's transcultural word. This transcultural
word calls for the transformation of all people and
societies in accordance with God's creational and
eschatological ideals. The biblical message always stands
as a norm against which all culture must be judged, for all
culture is shaped by human rebellion against God. Human
concepts of justice and liberation need to come under the
judgment of divine revelation.

This all leads to a careful exegesis which begins with
a distancing of the interpreter from the text. This
distancing needs to involve an awareness of the constant
danger of reading the interpreter's understandings into the
text. In this process the behavioral science can play an
important role. It must also include a careful examination
of the socio-cultural context of the text, recognising that
the message is presented in forms that relate to very
specific socio-cultural practices. These need to be
carefully studied to understand what the writer is doing
with them. Having understood what the writer is doing, one
can then seek to do something similar in the contemporary
culture, recognising the eschatological demand that moves

beyond all contexts.

Conn emphasises that this process is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who communicates the meaning of the text to the contemporary setting through our limitations and failures. It is the Spirit of God who enables the common people to respond to the Word of God authentically, without the help of academics.

Clowney focuses on hermeneutics as they relate to ethics. He proposes that the Bible functions in a triperspectival fashion. In its normative function it provides commandments for adult heirs of Christ which are to be obeyed in a creative manner. These commands are to be understood christologically. This obedience is not merely legal but the response in love to Christ, seeking to work towards the goal of the kingdom. He proposes that the biblical commands involve both broad principles and specific applications. Where the specific applications do not apply, Christians are called to a creative working out of the principles. The biblical instructions and narratives function as paradigm examples for the implementation of the principle. Christ brought a transformation in biblical ethics, the New Testament records a gradual outworking of the new moral consciousness in the church. So today the church must develop an ethical understanding which goes beyond what the apostles taught, but which is based upon the principles they laid down.

This moving beyond the New Testament ethics arises out of the situational function of the Bible. Christians

participate in the inbreaking of God's eschatological kingdom. People understand their actions as part of a story that they are living out. Christians are part of God's story, His redemptive history, and this story must shape their lives. As such they are called upon to recognise how God's eschatological purposes are being worked out and to participate in them. As the eschatological people of God, Christians should expect that principles given to the apostles will find new or fuller applications. The goals of the kingdom are pursued differently as times change, yet the basic principles remain the same. Today Christians must seek to develop these in new situations as God's eschatological kingdom advances.

The existential function of the scripture serves to emphasise that ethics is about the transformation of people in relationship to God. The Bible gives Christians a personal and communal identity which determines the ethical decisions they make.

Thus while Frame, Poythress, Conn and Clowney call for the application of the Bible to contemporary issues, Conn and Clowney emphasise the distance between the present context and the biblical context. This distance revolves around a recognition of the accommodated nature of Scripture and the eschatological dynamic which calls the people of God forward to a greater realisation of the kingdom in the present world.[40] As such it calls for a creative obedience in a new contexts. The danger involved in such a hermeneutic is the problem of confusing contemporary

understandings of liberation and justice with God's
eschatological ideals. If this happens it will result in a
canon within the canon, a canon determined by contemporary
secular ideologies.

One dimension which they fail to address is
the concept of the hermeneutical privilege of the poor.
While one does not expect agreement with it, it is a
surprising omission in the light of Conn's insistence that
theology must identify with the poor and must be done in
partnership with the marginalised of society. If God is on
the side of the poor and Jesus identified with them and
calls us to do the same, then this must effect our
hermeneutic.

4   THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS.

Frame brings the theory and praxis of the Christian faith
into a close dialectical relationship. He affirms that
there is a sense in which theory precedes praxis, yet goes
on to argue that praxis precedes theory. Growth in praxis
ought to lead to growth in theoretical knowledge and vice
versa. Here Frame is critical of many in the Reformed
tradition who have argued that "life is built on doctrine,"
as the opposite is also true.

4.1 The Origins of Frame's Concept of the Relationship
between Theory and Praxis.

Frame's understanding is built on his covenantal
understanding of knowledge. The knowledge of God is the

response of the whole person to God. As such it includes an intellectual response but this is only a part of the response. From this perspective it can be argued that theory is actually a part of praxis. Frame argues that the biblical categories of obedience and knowledge are near synonyms so that knowledge is portrayed as a part of obedience, and obedience as a part of knowledge. He defines the relationship as follows. "Knowledge designates the friendship between ourselves and God, and obedience designates our activity within that relationship". [41] Thus a person's knowledge of God is seen in their life of obedience to Him.

Theology is not, therefore, to be identified with the knowledge of God but functions as a dimension of it - a dimension which is vitally related to the response of the theologian in obedience to God. Frame develops this further in relation to his understanding of theology as the application of Scripture by persons to all of reality. Theology is an intensely personal discipline involving as it does a person's relationship with God. This relationship is shaped by the process of sanctification, through which a person grows in obedience to God.

Frame argues that the Bible brings intellectual knowledge and ethical knowledge into a close relationship in the process of sanctification. Referring to texts such as Romans 12:1-2; Phillipians 1:10 and Hebrews 5: 11-14 he argues that growth in intellectual knowledge arises out of a growth in ethical knowledge and practice. Yet there are

other passages which emphasise the opposite. Frame thus
argues that "learning and doing God's will are
simultaneous." [42] They must go together. Theology as such
is vitally involved with praxis and thus must be ethical in
nature. He can thus argue that ethics is not "a branch of
theology, but equivalent to theology; for all theology
answers ethical questions."[43] As such, theology is the
"reflective commmitment within praxis".[44]

While Frame acknowledges that his emphasis has not been
prominent in the Reformed tradition, this is particularly
true of those strongly influenced by Reformed Orthodoxy.
Calvin's approach however arose out of a distinctly
practical aim and a more existential epistemology.
Theology, for Calvin, must arise out of a life of faith and
obedience and must be done "coram deo". He could affirm
that "all right knowledge of God is born of obedience."[45]

Another major root of Frame's understanding is his
concept of meaning as use. Wittgenstein's concept of meaning
is such that meaning is dependent on use within a particular
language game. Language games, in turn, are grounded in
different forms of life. Paul Holmer uses this to develop
an understanding of the reciprocal nature of the relationship
between theology and life, which is similar to Frame's [46] and
which possibly influenced him. Meaning as use implies that
one can discover if a person has a right concept of
something by their use of the concept. To have a concept of
something thus involves the ability to do something, and thus
a dispostion to act in a certain way. Thus greater

experience in using a particular concept will lead to a greater understanding of its meaning.

4.2 Theology and Political Praxis.

The major issue that faces Frame's theology is the nature of praxis particularly as it relates to the socio-political issues. Frame does not address this issue directly other than by the understanding that a Christian's praxis is determined by the application of the whole of the Bible to specific issues. Yet within the American evangelical community there is considerable diversity between the evangelical right and the evangelical left.

This diversity is seen in those who have made use of Frame's thought. John Frame's approach to social ethics fits into the right of evangelicalism. It would be unfair to regard him as having a strongly ideological commitment to the political right. His attempt to do justice to what the whole of the Bible offers leads to a critique of certain elements of the right's agenda. It is, however, noticeable that while certain elements of his theology are a strong implicit critique of capitalism, he does not develop this critique. Notably in dealing with women's issues both Frame and Poythress argue for a more traditional under-standing of the genders as equal but different, affirming male leadership and authority in the family and the church. Both Frame and Poythress show considerable sympathy with the concerns of the Christian Reconstruction Movement. Poythress is, however, more critical of it than Frame.

Christian Reconstructionists have made use of Frame's ideas. James Jordan, for example, describes Frame's The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God as the "most important work in evangelical epistemology in several decades."[47] Frame himself acknowledges a debt to the Christian Reconstruction Movement for its insistance that all of Scripture is normative for Christians today. [48] His understanding of covenant lordship, his dependence on Van Til and his definition of theology open his ideas to use by the Reconstructionists.

Carl Ellis has, in turn, used Frame's concepts to develop his evangelical theology of black liberation in a way which would not be amenable to the agenda of the right. His affirmation of the Civil Rights movement, the congressional black caucus and figures such as Martin Luther King and Malcom X leads his political praxis in a different direction.

Harvie Conn, in particular has used Frame's theology within the context of a political praxis strongly influenced by the evangelical left. As such, he is critical of the capitalist and middle class captivation of the American church, calling for an identification with the poor and the oppressed. Theology must take up the agenda of the Third World and the urban poor. Christian mission must not only be directed towards the sinners but also towards those who have been sinned against. The praxis of the church involves a commitment to justice for the poor and oppressed of the world. Conn "affirms liberation theology as a form of my

own conscientisation, the awakening of my own Christian conscience." [49] As we noted, he has affirmed a more progressive response to women's issues. [50]

While Frame ties his theology very closely to the church's praxis, the nature of this praxis is not determined by his epistemology. This is not to reduce the church's praxis to its response to socio-political issues. Frame, Poythress and Conn would argue that it is far more than this. It needs to be affirmed, however, that the pursuit of justice for the poor and oppressed is a vital dimension of Christian discipleship and spirituality. [51] There is also a hermeneutical dimension as R.L. Pratt states "struggling with social oppression leads interpreters to ask questions of the Bible in ways that others may never consider". [52] The failure to incorporate the struggle for justice as a vital dimension of Christian praxis will thus result in divergent theologies. Frame notes that theology as an art has a mysterious dimension which leads to different thinkers understanding ethical issues differently. They thus apply the Bible differently. What for one is injustice is for another what the Bible demands. Frame's theology does not grapple adequately with this issue. Possibly it is unable to do so in its present form.

5. CONCLUSION

In this analysis of Frame's epistemological and methodological approach I have attempted to demonstrate that, while Frame's approach differs from the traditional methodology of

Reformed Orthodoxy , its roots are deep within the Reformed

tradition.

In fundamental ways its basic understanding is

dependent upon key themes drawn from Calvin and Reformed

Orthodoxy, particularly as they were understood by Cornelius

van Til. This is seen in that the fundamental principles of

the multi-perspectival approach to theology are the doctrine

of God and the doctrine of Scripture. Protestant scholastics

argued that the foundational principles of theology were the

doctrine of God as the essential foundation and the doctrine

of Scripture as the cognitive foundation.[53] These

principles and the rest of theology were developed in terms

of the scholastic method of the time. Frame takes these

principles and develops his method in terms of contemporary

philosophical and linguistic understanding.

It is notable that while Calvin made use primarily of

the tools of rhetoric, thus emphasising the communication of

the word of God in a pastoral context, the scholastics used

the scholastic method and Aristotle and Ram's philosophy in

developing a theology in the context of the academy. Frame,

Poythress and Conn have turned to the tools of the

philosophy of language, linguistics and behavioral sciences

and return to a practical and missiological context.

Another major contribution to Frame's theology is his

understanding of the nature of the covenant. Frame's

understanding is largely dependent on the work of Meredith

Kline who draws parallels between the biblical covenants and

the Hittite suzerainty treaties. Frame developed it from an

organisational concept in biblical theology to an
epistemological basis for understanding the relationship
between God and His creation. This, then, determines his
concept of theology.

There is thus both continuity and discontinuity between
Frame's theology and that of the older Westminster
tradition. Its fundamental roots remain within that
tradition and it would be wrong to see it as a denial of, or
movement away from, its core commitment to Reformed
Orthodoxy. Yet it is new in the way he has creatively used
orthodox Reformed theology in dialogue with contemporary
philosophy to address the challenges of the modern world.

Frame's theology has several weaknesses which hinder
its use in the development of a contextual evangelical
theology in South Africa. One of the most notable is the
absence of a strongly christological understanding of
epistemology and revelation. This is particularly striking
since Frame insists that redemption in Christ is the central
message of the Bible.

Another weakness is the reality that Frame's method
has given rise to notably different approaches to major
socio-political issues and thus to a different understanding
of the praxis of the church. This difference arises out of
significant differences at a number of levels. On a
theological level there are different understandings of the
relationship between God and the poor. While Frame affirms
God's concern for justice and that he "will vindicate the
believing poor,"[54] he rejects the concept of God's

preferential option for the poor. Conn, on the other hand, affirms that "the God of the Bible is on the side of the poor" [55]. He calls for justice that is measured by its treatment of the poor and oppressed. The content of God's lordship as presence, control and authority is to be shaped by God's location on the side of the poor.

Secondly there is a hermeneutical differance. Frame's hermeneutic leads to an absolutising of certain social arrangements referred to in the Bible. Conn's hermeneutic calls for their transformation in the light of the eschatological renewal and transformation of creation. Conn emphasises the accommodated nature of biblical revelation in relation to socio-cultural contexts which are moulded by human sinfulness. Frame tends to view Scripture as having an idealistic perfection.

Thirdly, on a sociological level, while Frame and Poythress refer to the sociology of knowledge they do not self consciously ask to what extent their theologising is the product of their middle class location in society.[56] Conn, on the other hand, proposes that as Van Til called for a hermeneutical vigilance in relation to philosophical presuppositions, this vigilance should be expanded to include sociological conditioning. Conn in various places notes the influence of his missionary career in Korea combined with academic studies in anthropology of religion.[57] As a missionary he worked amongst the marginalised - lepers, beggar boys and prostitutes in a state under right wing rule. His work led to confrontation with, and

opposition from, the authorities. At present Conn lives and
worships in inner city Philadelphia, experiencing at first
hand the realities of the urban poor. We are thus forced to
ask, is it the combination of this experience with training
in the social sciences that causes him to see ethical issues
differently from Frame and Poythress? If this is so, then
sociological as well as spiritual factors play an important
role in the way Scripture is applied to the contemporary
world. People see things differently despite their having
the same data because they approach the text from different
social perspectives.

Frame's theology demonstrates the resources available,
to conservative evangelical theology which can be used to
develop a contextual evangelical theology in South Africa,
a theology which remains faithful to the core commitments of
conservative evangelical theology yet dynamically engaged in
the real life situation of contemporary South Africa. Yet,
if such a theology is to be developed using Frame's
concepts, it must move beyond Frame and deal with the
weaknesses in his theology. Conn, I would propose, points
the way forward, but his work suffers from the lack of a
carefully worked out and expounded theological epistemology.
He tends to draw on the work of others without demonstrating
the coherence of the ideas developed. A South African
evangelical theology would have to move significantly beyond
the New Westminster Theology, particularly in the areas of
the doctrine of Scripture, the relationship between God and
the poor, the incorporation of the sociology of knowledge,

and in an appropriation of a theology of the Cross. While such a theology must move beyond Frame, Poythress and even Conn, I would propose that it ought not to ignore their creative contributions.

Notes to Chapter IV

1 "Theologia archetypa" is God's knowledge of Himself
while "Theologia ectypa" is a creature's knowledge of God.

2 See John Frame, Van Til: The Theologian (Chattanooga,
Pilgrim, 1976), pp. 8 - 20.

3 Timothy George, Theology of the Reformers (Nashville,
Broadman, 1988), pp. 189 & 190.

4 E.A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's
Theology (New York, Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 21
& 22.

5 Cornelius Van Til, "Nature and Scripture", in The
Infallible Word - A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty
of Westminster Seminary, edited by P. Woolley and N.B.
Stonehouse (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978),
pp. 263-301 (p 269).

6 In addition to those mentioned below Vern Poythress,
R.L. Pratt and D. Clowney have used it to develop various
hermeneutical models. See V.S. Poythress - "God's Lordship
in Interpretation", Westminster Theological Journal 50:1
(1988) 27-64, and "Christ the Only Savior of
Interpretation", Westminster Theological Journal 50:2
(1988), 305-321, R.L. Pratt Jnr., He gave Us Stories - The
Bible Students' Guide to Interpreting Old Testament
Narratives (Brentwood, Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1990), and
D. Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics", in Inerrancy
and Hermeneutic. A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate, edited
by H.M. Conn (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988), pp. 211-236.

7 Carl F. Ellis Jr., Beyond Liberation - The Gospel in
the Black American Experience (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity
Press, 1983), p. 121.

8 See J.J.Davis, "Review of Eternal Word and Changing
Worlds", Westminster Theological Journal 48:2 (1986),
409-410.

9 H.M. Conn, Eternal Word and Changing Worlds -
Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Trialogue (Grand
Rapids, Zondervan, 1984), p. 338.

10 See Conn, A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission:
Dispelling the Urban Stereotypes (Grand Rapids, Zondervan,
1987).

11 Conn, Clarified Vision, pp. 140-147.

12 A. Kuyper, Christianity and the Class Struggle,
trans. D. Jellema (Grand Rapids, Piet Hein, 1950), pp.
27-28 quoted in N. Wolterstorff, Until Justice and Peace

<u>Embrace</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983) p. 73.

13 This relates not only to Afrikaner Calvinism, which legitimates apartheid, but also to right wing Christian groups such as the Gospel Defence League. The theology of these groups is characterised by an extreme and simplistic Christian Reconstructionism combined with elements of the church growth theory. The result is that they promote the idea that God has ordained the self determination of ethno-cultural groups who must govern themselves in terms of Mosaic law (not including ceremonial law). They criticise the present negotiations as an abandonment of South Africa's "Christian" heritage. They are strongly capitalistic and reject any attempt to redress the injustice of apartheid as theft. They have been critical of attempts to prevent the security forces' abuse of power. The general implication of their teaching protects the benefits obtained by the injustice of apartheid. It must be noted that one example of this teaching, C.L. Jordaan and M. Kreitzer, eds. <u>A Christian Manifesto in South Africa - Study Edition</u> (Pretoria, Christian Action Africa, 1991), p. 10 lists Frame, <u>The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988) as resource material,thus indicating that they find resources in Frame's epistemology to expound their ideas.

14 Poythress has written "Frame and I have influenced each other heavily, so that we sometimes do not know who started a particular idea ... I agree with him concerning almost everything that he has in print." Personal correspondence 14.1.1991.

15 It is interesting to note that M.P. Engel has proposed that Calvin's anthropology can best be understood if it is viewed as a dynamic structure resulting from Calvin having approached the subject from a number of different perspectives. This is not, however, to say that Calvin deliberately set out to theologise in a perspective fashion, rather this was an unconscious result of his theologising. See M.P. Engel, <u>John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology</u> (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1983).

16 See R.A. Muller, <u>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms - Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1985), pp. 299-301 and <u>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</u>, vol. 1 <u>Prolegomena to Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987), pp. 123-136.

17 See for example J.O. Buswell, <u>A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion</u>, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1962), pp 14 & 15 and C. Van Til, <u>An Introduction to Systematic Theology</u>, (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), p. 2.

18 See V. Poythress "Analysing a Biblical Text : Some Important Linguistic Distinctions", <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u> 32:2 (1979), 113-137, "Analysing a Biblical Text: What Are We After?" <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u> 32:4 (1979), 319-331, "A Framework to Discourse Analysis: The Components of a Discourse from a Tagmemic View Point", <u>Semiotica</u> 38 (1982), 277-298 and "Hierarchy in Discourse Analysis: A revision of Tagmemics", <u>Semiotica</u> 40 (1982) 107-137.

19 This needs to be affirmed in contrast to the assertion of M. W. Karlberg that Frame "rests meaning in human language". "On the Theological Correlation of Divine and Human Language", <u>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</u> 32:1 (1989), 99-105 (p. 100).

20 See L. Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953), p. 20, and W.P. Alston, <u>Philosophy of Language</u>, (Edgewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1964), pp. 32-44.

21 J.M. Frame, <u>Medical Ethics - Principles, Persons and Problems</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), p. 10.

22 See Frame, <u>Evangelical Reunion - Denominations and the Body of Christ</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1991).

23 Frame, <u>Reunion</u>, p. 52.

24 See Conn, "The Mission of the Church" and "Contextualisation: Where do we Begin" in <u>Evangelicals and Liberation</u>, edited by C.E. Armerding (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), pp. 60-119 and "Theologies of Liberation" in <u>Tensions in Contemporary Theology</u> edited by S.N. Gundry and A.F. Johnson (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1986), pp.327-434.

25 See Conn, <u>Eternal Word</u>.

26 See V.S. Poythress, <u>Science and Hermeneutics - the Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation</u> (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988).

27 Frame, <u>Knowledge of God</u>, p 81.

28 In particular, Frame draws on the work of his colleague Meredith Kline, who draws parallels between biblical covenants and Hittite suzerainty treaties. See, for example, his <u>The Structure of Biblical Authority</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972). This approach has been has been questioned by some scholars and modified by others. See C.G. Bartholomew, "The Composition of Deuteronomy" (M.Th dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1992) pp. 15-34.

29 See P. Holmer, <u>The Grammar of Faith</u> (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1978). Frame studied under Holmer at Yale Divinity School.

30 Conn, <u>Eternal Word</u>, pp. 216-270.

31 Conn, <u>Eternal Word</u> pp. 231 & 232.

32 Karlberg, p. 104.

33 Frame, <u>Knowledge of God</u>, p. 103.

34 V.S. Poythress, "Structural Approaches to Understanding The Theology of the Apostle Paul" (D.Th Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1981), pp 18-22. He also refers to how the gospel writers apply the message of Jesus to new situations. See " Framework of Discourse Analysis".

35 See the discussion in Alston, pp.32-34.

36 See Frame, "Toward a Theology of the State." <u>Westminster Theological Journal</u> 51:2 (1989), 199-226.

37 See Section 4 below.

38 David Clowney was a member of the Philadelphia faculty but left in 1988 as a result of his disagreement with the seminary's position on the ordination of women.

39 Conn, "Feminist Theology", in <u>New Dictionary of Theology</u>, edited by S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 257.

40 The use of an eschatological approach to social ethics has signified a major shift in the reformed tradition in dealing with issues raised by oppression and injustice. See E.P. Hiedeman, "Old Confessions and New Testament" <u>Reformed Journal</u> 38 (1988), 7-10 and J.W. de Gruchy, <u>Liberating Reformed Theology - A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 83-88.

41 Frame, <u>Knowledge of God</u> p. 44.

42 Frame, "Doctrine of the Christian Life" (lecture outline), p. 110.

43 Frame, "Christian Life", p 1.

44 Conn, <u>Eternal Word</u>, p 39.

45 J. Calvin, <u>Institutes of the Christian Religion,</u> trans. F.L. Battles, ed. J.T. McNeil, Library of Christian Classics vol. 10 & 11 (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1960) 1:6:2

46 See Holmer.

47 J. B. Jordan, <u>Through New Eyes - Developing a Biblical View of the World</u> (Brentwood, Wolgemuth and Hyatt 1988), p. 317. Christian Reconstructionists do not all share this positive evaluation. Gary North is critical of Frame's refusal to affirm or criticise opposing positions. This, however, is a direct consequence of Frame's perspectival approach which leads him to point out the good and the bad in opposing positions. See G. North, <u>Westminster's Confession -The Abandonment of the Van Til Legacy</u> (Tyler, Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 30, 202 & 203.

48 Frame, <u>Medical Ethics</u>, p 85.

49 Conn, "Theologies of Liberation", p 405.

50 Conn's position mediates between the evangelical feminists and the more traditional approach. He affirms creational differences between the genders, argues for a more egalitarian approach yet seems to hold to some form of a servant leadership role for men while criticising the evangelical church of sexism. He argues that some of the limitations imposed on women in the New Testament are cultural accommodations that fall short of the eschato-logical ideal.

51 See N. Wolterstorff, " Why care about Justice" in <u>Evangelicalism - Surviving its Success</u> edited by D. Fraser (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987), "Liturgy, Justice and Holiness", <u>Reformed Journal</u>, 39:12 (1989), 12-20 and "Justice as an Authentic Condition of Liturgy", <u>Theology Today</u>. 48:1 (1991) 6-31.

52 Pratt, p. 49.

53 See Muller, <u>Reformed Dogmatics</u>, pp. 295-308.

54 Frame, "Christian Life", p. 235.

55 Conn, "Theologies of Liberation", p. 403.

56 It is interesting for example to ask why Poythress chose to deal primarily with Old Testament criminal justice and not social justice in his <u>The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses</u> (Brentwood, Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991). Is it because the issue of crime and punishment is a major cause of concern to middle-class Americans, while social justice is not?

57 See, for example, Conn. "Theologies of Liberation", p 405 and "I Changed the Message and God Changed me" <u>Evangelical Missions Quarterly</u> 21:29 (1985), 182-184.

CHAPTER V   BEYOND THE NEW WESTMINSTER THEOLOGY.

In seeking to move beyond the New Westminster Theology we
will attempt to point out the strengths, as well as the
ways in which its weaknesses can be overcome and how it can
be used in developing a South African evangelical theology.
We will not attempt, however, to describe such a theology in
any detail. [1]

1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE NEW WESTMINSTER THEOLOGY

The contribution of the New Westminster Theology arises out
of its rootedness in conservative Reformed evangelicalism
and in its creative developments of that tradition. This
rootedness in the conservative Reformed evangelicalism is
particularly important due to the formative influence this
type of evangelicalism has had on the dominant conservative
evangelical theology. The New Westminster theology enables
a person to be both faithful to the heart of the
Conservative Evangelical tradition and yet radically engaged
with the contemporary context. From an evangelical
perspective it is particularly important to demonstrate that
these new ideas arise out of the evangelical tradition and
have not been imported from an outside, and therefore
suspect, source. Evangelical attempts to develop a
contextually engaged theology are often labelled and
rejected as liberalism or marxism.

1.1 Theologies and "Systems".

One of the most significant contributions of the New
Westminster Theology is its understanding of the task of
theology as the application of Scripture to all of reality.
This embodies a rejection of the traditional idea that the
task of theology is to discover, articulate and defend the
system of truth contained in the Bible, a system which is
often identified as the "faith once delivered to the
saints". It is this understanding of theology which has
stifled theological creativity and prevented evangelicals
from engaging the real issues of the contemporary world.

A related issue is the relativising effect of
perspectivalism. Frame's theology relativises all
theological systems in order to emphasise the supreme
authority of Scripture. One of the major problematics of
the traditional understanding of theology has been the
tendency to equate a theological system with Scripture. The
system then functions both as a grid which excludes biblical
data and as a norm whereby other groups are evaluated.
Multiperspectivalism calls for a greater recognition of the
fallability of all theological systems.

Multiperspectivalism requires that evangelicals ground
their theological security in the Bible and not in some
system of theology. As Poythress says:

> "The Bible is able to protect us from going astray. We
> do not need to cling tightly to our previous beliefs in
> order to be safe. In fact, we will not be safe if we
> are not open to having the Bible challenge even the
> views that we dearly cherish."[2]

1.2 Contextualization.

The New Westminster Theology makes a major contribution towards the development of contextual theologies. The concept of triperspectivalism legitimates and encourages theologians to wrestle with the real world in dialogue with other disciplines. When this is combined with the concept of theology as application, it demands that all theology be done in an interdisciplinary fashion. Theology cannot be abstracted from its context but must be done in a selfconsciously contextual manner.

The evangelicals have often feared that contextually approached theology would lead to syncretism and relativism. They have thus tried to find a security in an understanding of theology as the articulation of an objective system of truth. This is sometimes related to a second step by which the objective doctrine is applied or contextualised. Frame's theology rejects all such notions, yet its insistance on the supreme authority of Scripture guards against relativism and syncretism.

The understanding of meaning as use and the consequent rejection of any distinction between meaning and application are an important corrective to the dualism that has paralysed evangelical theology in the face of contemporary issues. This distinction allowed for a wide variety of responses to socio-economic issues without a person's standing as an evangelical being questioned. In the South African context one could be an evangelical of good standing and be an ardent supporter of apartheid. Support of, or

opposition to, apartheid were applications of the Bible and thus a range of different opinions were acceptable. Any attempt to link the gospel and a rejection of apartheid too closely was regarded as a compromise of the gospel. Frame's understanding of meaning as application leads to the conclusion that a failure to apply the gospel to the apartheid situation means that one does not understand the meaning of the gospel. Different applications mean people have different understandings of the meaning of the gospel or believe in different gospels. This is the point made by the Kairos Document, The Evangelical Witness in South Africa and The Road to Damascus. [3] All of these documents were strongly criticised by the dominant evangelical tradition.

The perspectival approach to theology legitimates the construction of contextual theologies which view the whole of theology in terms of a specific issue, or group of issues. This opens the door for much greater creativity in evangelical theology. Systematic Theology is no longer confined to repeating and improving traditional systems but rather can develop theologies that deal with contemporary issues such as ecology, socio-political liberation, history, economics and so forth. While this has been taking place in the broader ecumenical discussion, evangelicals have tended to relegate these issues to subsections of ethics, often rejecting theologies constructed around such issues as reductionisms.

1.3 <u>Theology and Praxis.</u>

Evangelical theology has been characterized by a dichotomy

between theory and practice. Theory had the dominant rule

and practice was merely the application of theory. This

was often combined with a withdrawal from engaging the

broader society. As a result, theology became abstracted

from the praxis of the church. The theologian's task was to

study the Bible and to produce the correct theories which

would then be applied by the church.

Frame's contribution is to bring theology and praxis

into a dialectical relationship of mutual dependence. This

relationship demands that theologians be engaged in working

out their faith in the real world. A failure to do this

will result in warped and false theology.

It needs also to be noted that the issues with which

theology must wrestle within a perspectival manner must

arise out of the praxis of the church. Conn proposes that

it is the issues raised by the church's mission in the world

which become the questions which begin the hermeneutical

spiral. Theology thus, by its nature, has a missionary

task.

2 <u>OVERCOMING THE WEAKNESSES IN THE NEW WESTMINSTER THEOLOGY.</u>

2.1 <u>Christology and Lordship.</u>

An evaluation of Frame's concept of triperspectivalism leads

to the conclusion that there are three areas of weakness.

The first is that the emphasis on the concept of lordship

can lead to a theological and ecclesiastical triumphalism.[4]

The second is the difficulty of correlating the three

Lordship attributes of control, authority and presence,

particularly in the situation of intense human suffering.

The final one is the absence of an explicit christological

dimension to his epistemology. [5] I would propose that the

integration of such a christological dimension would do much

to alleviate the other two areas of weakness. This

christological dimension needs to be integrated into the

concepts of revelation, epistemology and the covenant.

Frame's understanding of epistemology and of revelation

is implicitly christological in its drawing of a strong

distinction between regenerate and unregenerate knowledge

but this never becomes explicit due to his emphasis on the

relationship between a person and God the Trinity, his

understanding of the Word of God and, possibly, his emphasis

on the creator - creature distinction. These tend to

obscure the role of Christ as mediator of creation,

revelation and redemption.

Frame's concept of the Word as an attribute of God,

particularly, but not exclusively, related to the second

person of the Trinity, is open to major exegetical critique.

Frame strongly critiques theological arguments which

base their exegesis on an understanding of meaning at a word

level rather than at a sentence level, and he recognises

that theological terms are not synonymous with biblical

words. Yet his understanding of the "Word" is based on a

linking of numerous passages where "word" or a synonym is

used. This problem is exaserbated by his tendency to make

use of proof texts without careful exegesis of the passages
concerned. [6] He thus uses John 1:1 to emphasise the divine
character of the "Word", but does not exegete the rest of
the passage which clearly interprets the "Word"
christologically.[7]

It would seem better to assert with Calvin [8] that all
revelation has its origin in God the Son, the Word of God
who mediates creation, revelation and redemption. [9] Such a
view would need to be based on a careful exegesis of
passages such as John 1:1-18, Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews
1:1-4. A christological understanding of the "Word" would
still allow for a triperspectival approach to the concept of
the Word, in that, God's activity in creation and provi-
dence and his normative revelation could be understood as
being mediated by Christ while it is Christ who, by His
Spirit, is present with His people. [10]

A christological understanding of these issues would
also entail that they be understood eschatologically. [11] As
such, the concepts are to be seen as being intrinsically
teleological, so that God's providential rule is seen to be
the process of bringing together of all things under
Christ's headship.[12] The revelation in Scripture points
towards the eschatological revelation of God in Christ.[13]
His presence points towards the eschatological presence of
God amongst His people. [14] As such, these concepts are not
static, nor are they focused on the past, but rather point
to the future.

The concept of the covenant lordship must also be seen

christologically. This clearly arises out of Frame's and
Poythress' theology. Frame's understanding of lordship
includes an understanding of the christological title
"Kurios", and he insists that the centre of Scripture is
redemption in Christ. Poythress argues that the Old
Testament must be understood christologically. Thus
lordship must also be interpreted christologically. It is
perhaps important to note Paul's discussion of the reign of
Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, where the argument is
based on an understanding that the Kingdom of God in its
present form is uniquely the Kingdom of Christ.

The concept of the covenant itself has an eschatological
character as God's purpose for His creation;[15] a purpose
which centres on Christ as the one who is both the covenant
Lord and the perfect covenant servant.[16] It is through
Christ that God's purposes for creation are brought about.

This christological understanding of revelation,
epistemology, and of covenant lordship needs to include as a
central element, a theology of the cross. All of Christian
theology must rise out of an understanding of the cross.[17]
It is only from the perspective of the cross that God's
lordship as control, authority and presence can be
correlated.[18] It is the cross which destroys all theological
and ecclesiological trimphalism.

Such a theology of the cross needs to be developed
covenantly. Christ is the covenant Lord who becomes
the servant in order to take upon Himself the covenant
curse. The covenant Lord is the one who was oppressed and

crucified by human beings and forsaken and cursed by God.

The major difficulty facing the integration of a theology of the cross with Frame's theology is his dependence on Van Til's concept of the creator - creature distinction. Van Til criticises Lutheran christology for its failure to do justice to this distinction.[19]. Thus the concept of the "communicatio idiomatum" which forms the basis of most understandings of the theology of the cross would probably be unacceptable to Frame. [20]

Frame and Poythress argue that a perspectival approach enables one to integrate the distinctive of other theologies into one's own. [21] This would involve the attempt to show how Reformed theology integrates the strengths in the Lutheran theology of the cross without sacrificing its own strength.

The first major strength of the theology of the cross is its emphasis that God is fully revealed in the crucified Christ and thus the cross is the foundation and norm of all theology. This concept is compatible with Frame's proposals as it accords well with the distinction between regenerate and unregenerate knowledge of God. True knowledge of God comes through a saving encounter with the crucified Christ. Nor does this compete with Frame's insistence that Scripture is the norm for theology. As he also insists that redemption in Christ, and therefore the cross, is the central focus of the Bible. The issue here is one of emphasis, in that the cross ought to have greater prominence in Frame's theology, as the basic presupposition of the Christian

faith.[22] Such a view would be strengthened by a christological epistemology.

The second major strength of the theology of the cross is the understanding that God shares in Himself the experience of oppressive suffering and God-forsakenness. An attempt to integrate this concept can be approached from two directions. Firstly, this needs to be done form the perspective of the humanity of Christ. As Calvin stated, "it is by Christ-Man that we are led to Christ-God".[23] It is through the humanity of Christ that we come to see His deity.

Jesus, in His humanity, suffered as God's covenant servant and image bearer.[24] The concept of the image of God links all humanity very closely to God. As Calvin comments "no one can be injurious to his brother without wounding God himself".[25] God is involved in all human suffering. Christ, the perfect image of God, enters into the suffering of humanity and experience its God-forsakenness. As such, God Himself is intimately involved with the suffering of Christ in His humanity.

Secondly, this can be seen from the perspective of the unity of the person of Christ. The issue here is expressed by Phillip Hughes (a former member of the Westminster faculty).

"It is true that the Son endured our dereliction in
that he was incarnate, that what he suffered was
suffered Man for man; but the eternal Son is not in
any way removed from this suffering. To disassociate
the human nature from the divine nature of Christ in
such a way as to make them independently functioning
entities would disrupt the unity of his person and

so resuscitate ancient heresy. The desire to "protect"
the deity of Christ from the endurance of the torment
of Calvary must be resisted." [26]

Hughes thus proposes that to remove God from the suffering
of the cross entails a denial of the Chalcedonian formulae
which Van Til seeks to affirm in his understanding of the
creator - creature distinction.

Hughes' argument depends on a number of biblical texts
which ascribe suffering to Christ in His deity. This
returns us to the issue of the "communicato idiomatum." If
we are true to Frame's basic approach we are faced here with
an issue of theological paradox, as the consistent exegesis
of Scripture leads to two propositions which cannot be
reconciled. The first proposition is that of a strong
distinction between the creator and the creature. The
second is the ascription of the sufferings of Christ to His
deity. A careful exegesis of the texts will confirm Hughes'
conclusion. Frame's understanding of the perfection of
Scripture rules out any attempt to describe this as an
improper designation to emphasise the unity of the person of
Christi. [27] Following Frame's agenda the task of the
theologian is to affirm both sides of the paradox and to
trace out the relationships between them. [28] Such a task
leads beyond the scope of this thesis.

The Lordship attributes of presence, authority and
control need to be expounded in terms of the presence,
authority and control of the crucified Christ. They are
thus seen in terms of God hidden under his opposite, in a

context which appears to deny all of these attributes.
This in turn needs to be linked with the eschatological
character of these attributes. Creation is being moved
toward the eschaton when these attributes will be clearly
manifested.[29]

2.2 God and the Poor.

The Belhar Confession challenges Reformed theology when it
declares:

> "We believe that God has revealed Himself as the One who
> wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men;
> that in a world full of injustice and enmity He is in a
> special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the
> wronged and that He calls His Church to follow Him in
> this; that He brings justice to the oppressed, and gives
> bread to the hungry, that He frees the prisoner and
> restores sight to the blind, that He supports the
> downtrodden, protects the stranger; helps orphans and
> widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for Him
> pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and
> widows in their suffering; that He wishes to teach His
> people to do what is good and to seek the right."[30]

It is precisely at this point that Frame's theology is
ambiguous, allowing it to be used by people advocating
opposing political and economic viewpoints. In the South
African context this issue is of vital importance. I would
argue that it is an issue which cannot be escaped in any
context, as the issue revolves around the identity of the
God we worship. Psalm 82 emphasises that the characteristic
which distinguishes Yahweh from the other gods is his
advocacy of justice for the poor and oppressed.[31]

It can be validly argued that there are many other
factors which determine our understanding of God. The

relationship between God and the poor is, however, important for two reasons. Firstly, evangelical Christians, particularly those within the conservative Reformed tradition, have ignored this dimension of God's character. Secondly, a careful reading of key events in salvation history where God's lordship is revealed relate it to His identification with the poor and the oppressed. [32]

Frame, in his exposition of God's lordship, is heavily dependent upon references to the Exodus narrative, the book of Isaiah and certain New Testament passages. It is precisely here that God's action as covenant Lord is linked with his advocacy of justice for the poor and oppressed. In his exposition of God's Lordship, Frame fails to place God unambiguously on the side of the poor and oppressed when they are opposed by the rich and the powerful. [32] This is not, however, to deny Frame's compassion for the poor or his affirmation of God's justice.

The affirmation that God's covenant lordship is to be defined in terms of his being in a "special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" has major epistemological and methodological consequences. From an epistemological perspective it forces us to face the reality affirmed by the Old Testament prophets that true knowledge of God is intimately entwined with a commitment to justice for the oppressed.

A theology which takes seriously that affirmation yet which seeks to "become truly and comprehensively communal, must emerge from a praxis of commitment to God's peace for

the poor."[34]   The church's praxis cannot be seen only as a

generalised obedience to God, but must be shaped by a

commitment to justice, as the Belhar confession affirms;

> "the church must ... stand by people in any form of
> suffering, which implies, among other things, that the
> Church must witness against and strive against any form
> of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters
> and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
>
> that the church as the possession of God must stand
> where He stands, namely against injustice and with the
> wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness
> against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly
> seek their own interests and thus control and harm
> others."[35]

Theological reflection must not only arise out of such a

praxis but must also consciously be done from the

"underside" of history.   As Conn emphasises,

> "Our theologizing will have to validate itself and its
> claims in the same way that Jesus validated His.   His
> allegiance to the poor marked His preaching and was a
> sign of the coming of the Kingdom (Luke 4:18-21).   His
> healing of the sick and the blind and His preaching to
> the poor became a validation to a doubting John the
> Baptist of His messianic theology. (Matt. 11: 2-6)   It
> must become an integral part of ours as well."[36]

Such an identification will radically reshape theology in

terms of its methods and the issues with which it deals.   No

longer will it concentrate on what western theologians

arrogantly assume are "issues of permanent transcultural

significance."   It will reject the claim that the "classical

issues and doctrines have exhibited universal and permanent

relevance because they are common to all men and women from

the Near East, the Far East and the West, in the two thirds

world and the one-third world, in rural areas and the large

cities."[37]   A theology that begins with the poor, will, of

necessity, be a contextual theology arising out of specific contexts of poverty and oppression. It should not ignore the issues raised by the classical tradition but will recognise them for what they are; issues raised out of various contexts in the history of the church.

A programmatic setting out of the characteristics of such a theology lies beyond the scope of this thesis.[38] One issue of importance, however, is the concept of the epistemological or hermeneutical privilege of the poor. While this concept needs to be carefully qualified, it affirms that victims of society have a unique insight into the meaning of the Bible which the rich and powerful lack. This is a result of a number of factors. They are victims, which thus makes them closer to the original audience. Their situation is often accompanied by a recognition of their dependence upon God. Their position on the margins of society enables them to see how it works contrary to the justice God demands. They experience personally how a particular understanding of the Bible demonstrates God's concern for the poor and oppressed.

This privilege does not, however, mean that the victims of society always interpret the Bible correctly, nor does it mean that the non-victims always misunderstand the Bible. Such an understanding does not rule out the need for detailed historical grammatical exegesis, but insists that it has its limitation. It also insists that the interpretation of Scripture must take place within the community of faith. [39] It does, however, mean that

theology must be done in partnership with the victims of society.

2.3 <u>The Authority of the Bible and Contextual Theologies.</u>
Central to John Frame's theology is his understanding of the authority and infallibility of the Bible as a basic presupposition of theology.[40] This is, however, combined with a tendency to view the Bible as having an idealised perfection. [41] This combination prevents him from adequately wrestling with the accommodated and contextual character of biblical revelation.[42]

2.3.1 <u>The Context Relatedness of the Biblical Documents.</u>
Contemporary evangelical biblical scholarship has come to a greater appreciation of the occasional nature of all the biblical documents.[43] This, in turn, needs to be linked with the understanding of meaning as use. The meaning of a piece of language is what it does in a particular context. It can thus only be applied to new contexts once its original function is carefully understood. These two concepts taken together have major methodological implications. Any concept of the perfection of Scripture needs to take them into account.

If one accepts Frame's definition of Systematic Theology as the application of the whole of the Bible to specific issues, it needs to be recognised that this can only be done after a careful contextual analysis of individual biblical texts. Only once it is discovered what

the function of the particular texts are in their context,
can the difficult task of relating and applying them to
contemporary issues be undertaken. An example is the case of
state legitimacy. Evangelicals have usually begun and ended
their discussion with Romans 13. A contextual approach
would look at a wide variety of passages: for example, the
accounts of the judges rebellion against their "de facto"
rulers, the relationship between David and Saul, Moses and
Pharaoh, the rebellion of Jehu, the narratives in Daniel and
Esther and so on. Only once it is discovered why different
responses are demanded in different contexts can a
contemporary situation be addressed.

The occasional nature of the biblical texts needs to be
linked to an understanding of the accommodated nature of
biblical revelation. Biblical texts were not only
contextual in the sense that they addressed specific issues
but in the sense that they spoke within the context of a
specific socio-cultural situation. Exegetes need to deal
critically with the function of a particular text within its
socio-cultural context. To fuse the horizons of two
contexts without recognising the distance between them will
result in the text being misapplied. For example, the
washing of someone else's feet ceases to be an act of humble
service and becomes an ecclesiastical ritual. The meaning
of the original can often only be applied in a new form.
Failure to do so can lead to a legalistic externalism. This
dimension of exegesis needs to be part of all theologising
and not only where there is an obvious disonance between the

contemporary socio-historical context and the original context. The meaning of a text may seem obvious to a contemporary reader because it can be applied with ease to a contemporary context. The investigation of the socio-historical may, however, show that the apparently obvious meaning was not the original one.

2.3.2 <u>Accommodation and the Fallenness of Humanity.</u>

The issue of the accommodated character of biblical revelation has major implications for our understanding of the nature and task of theology. We will concentrate on the effect that accommodation to human sinfulness has on the theological use of the Bible. In seeking to remain true to Frame's basic presupposition and to the principles of the Reformation, I would propose that the Bible itself must provide the interpretive key to understanding its accommodation. The British evangelical scholar J.G. McConville has argued with reference to the Old Testament that an understanding of the curse in Genesis 3 "is a necessary pre-condition for understanding the relationship between the main protagonists in the story (God and man) and of the human condition as portrayed in the Bible."[44] He goes on to argue that God's redemptive activity in the Old Testament is shaped by the curse.

An example of this is seen in that the disunity and mutual antagonism of humanity that gives rise to nationalism is a result of the curse. It is against this background that God chooses Abraham to begin a new nation which will lead to

the blessing of all humanity. Israel's nationhood is a
result of the curse, yet is God's instrument for redemption.
"Problems" in the Old Testament, such as the destruction of
the Canaanites, need to be seen against this background.
McConville proposes that while this action was commanded by
God, it can only be seen as a relative good which is a
result of the curse.

In McConville's understanding, Genesis 1-11 provides a
key for understanding the accommodation to human fallenness
that pervades the Old Testament. He goes on to argue that
the Old Testament hope is to be understood as the
transformation of creation resulting from the removal of the
curse.

A second key to understanding the accommodated
character of the Old Testament is found in Matthew 19:3-9.
Evangelicals have often used the passage to argue that God's
creational intention for humanity was lifelong monogamy.
The provisions for polygamy and divorce in the mosaic law
are therefore accommodations to human sinfulness. This
principle obviously applies to other areas of Old Testament
law.

It raises another issue however, in that there are
cases in the Old Testament where God requires polygamy (the
leverate marriage system) and divorce (Ezra's reforms). In
particular situations it is possible that God requires the
lesser good, possibly to promote a greater good. In the
case of the leverate marriage this probably ensured the
protection and care of the widows. More importantly, it is

closely linked to the inheritance laws which form the basis of the distribution of land and economic justice. In the case of Ezra, the pure worship of Yahweh is at stake. This principle must again apply to other similar cases.

Harvie Conn, however, proposes a missiological solution to the problem, and not necessarily in contrast to the above proposal. As all human cultures are affected by sin, so God's revelation in culture will always be accommodated to human fallenness in order for communication to be possible. Revelation, however, moves beyond culture and transforms it so that it increasingly reflects God's righteousness and justice. An evaluation of Old Testament law will thus demonstrate parallels with other legal systems of the time, but with a dimension which transforms them in the direction of God's liberating justice. [45]

These issues all relate to the Old Testament and raise the question of its relevance to the New Testament which proclaims the inauguration of the eschaton. Harvie Conn[46] and David Clowney [47] argue that the New Testament presents a similar pattern. [48] Christians, as God's eschatological people, live in the tension between the already and the not yet. As such, there are eschatological principles embedded in the gospel which are gradually worked out in the New Testament era. This can be seen, for example, in the New Testament with relation to issues such as the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and the problem of food offered to idols.

They go on to argue that some of the eschatological

principles of righteousness and justice which were embedded
in the gospel were only worked out partially in the New
Testament era. Thus, for example, masters were not called
to free their slaves, but rather the relationship of slave
to masters was transformed. When these principles came to
be understood in their fullness, slavery was seen to be evil
and requiring abolition.

This accommodation to human sinfulness had a
missiological intention. While Christianity transformed
culture, it needed to be in contact with culture. Christians
were required to sacrifice their freedom in order that
people might not stumble over a cultural offence, but only
over the offence of the cross. [49] Here too, however, the
gospel acts as a transforming polemic against culture. As
contemporary culture has in many cases moved beyond the New
Testament incarnations of the gospel, so Christians are
called to work out the principles of the gospel more
consistently, yet maintaining contact with contemporary
culture. The eschatological goal always draws Christians
beyond their culture (and beyond the New Testament
applications) in manifesting God's liberating justice and
righteousness reflected in his creational and eschatological
intentions.

Such an understanding means that one cannot draw a
straight line from a biblical passage or norm to a
contemporary situation. Rather, each passage must be
studied against the background, its content and in relation
to God's creational and eschatological purposes. This, in

turn, needs to be related to the contemporary socio-cultural

context in order to transform it. Such a process will begin

with issues that lie at the core of a particular culture and

move gradually outwards over a period of time. This process

is intrinsically christological as Christ is the First and

the Last, the origin and goal of creation as well as the

one who redeems it from the curse.

2.4 Triperspectivalism and the Sociology of Knowledge.

Frame's epistemology and methodology serve to relativise

theology as a fallible human construct. In doing so, both

Frame and Poythress recognise the influence of social forces

on the production of ideas.[50] As such they recognise the

contribution of the sociology of knowledge and open the way

for it to be integrated into their theological

methodologies. Neither of them, however, develops this

fully. They are less sensitive to the impact of material

forces and one's social location to the process of

theologising.

Harvie Conn's work, however, demonstrates a self

critical attitude with regard to material forces and social

location. He proposes that Van Til's call for

epistemological vigilance with respect to philosophical

presuppositions should be extended to sociological factors.[51]

The legitimacy of this proposal is open to question as these

relate to two different epistemological approaches. Van

Til's approach views knowledge in terms of ideas, while the

sociology of knowledge sees knowledge in terms of social

and material forces. Van Til's understanding would critique the sociology of knowledge on the basis of its underlying ideas or presuppositions. The sociology of knowledge would critique Van Til's perspective in terms of its social origin. Thus while both relativise human knowledge, their starting point is different.

I propose that it is possible to integrate the insights of the sociology of knowledge into Frame's methodology. This would, however, involve the modification of certain of the presuppositions of secular sociology.[52] The most notable are its methodological atheism and its corollary, that society is a purely human construct. It would also require a theological affirmation of the epistemological role of social and material forces. The role of social forces is clearly seen in the New Testament teaching concerning the "world" and the "church", both of which influence a person's knowledge. Further the warnings about money in the synoptic gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament speak of the influence of material forces.

A modified sociology of knowledge would demonstrate a relativism with regard to human ideas, but affirm that there is a reality independent of human social constructs. If we linked this with Frame and Van Til's concept of the authority of the Bible, it would affirm this authority of the Bible, but relativise human interpretations of the Bible.[53]

Frame's triperspectivalism provides a methodological tool for the incorporation of such a sociology of knowledge

as a dimension of the situational perspective on knowledge.
As such, it would recognise and encourage an epistemological
vigilance with regard to the effect of social and material
forces on the production of theology.

Positively, it would encourage the people to do
theology self-consciously within a social context. Frame
has argued that theology must be done self-consciously
within the context of the church as the corporate dimension
of salvation. Such a location will make use of the
perspectives and gifts of others to overcome the limitations
of an individual theologian.[54] Richard Perkins has proposed
further that a recognition of the material forces
influencing knowledge should result in Christians
identifying with those to whom the gospel first came, that
is, the poor and oppressed. [55]

Such a perspectival approach to epistemology would
recognise that the process of gaining knowledge and the
factors hindering this process are seen in three areas. It
will recognise further that these three are vitally
interrelated as perspectives on the epistemological task, so
that none of them has priority. From a existential
perspective, it will recognise the role of human sin as
personal rebellion against God. This rebellion, can only be
overcome by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. From
a normative perspective, it will recognise the influence of
philosophical and theological presuppositions. Following
Van Til, it will call for such presuppositions to be
critically evaluated in the light of the normative authority

of scripture. From a contextual perspective, it will
recognise the formative role of socio-cultural and material
forces. It will demand that the negative effects of this
need to be overcome by theology being done within the church
and from the perspective of the poor. In all this its strong
affirmation of the authority of Scripture will prevent a
slide into total relativism.

3 <u>CONCLUSION.</u>

The four areas which we have examined in seeking to move
beyond the New Westminster theology are closely related. [56]
The christological and, therefore, eschatological
understanding of epistemology and lordship demand a
christological and eschatological hermeneutic when dealing
with the accommodated character of Scripture. A theology of
the cross is closely related to God's identification with
the poor.[57] They both require that theology be done from the
underside of history, from the perspective of those who
suffer unjustly. Our understanding of the sociology of
knowledge also requires that if theology is to deal with the
influence of material forces, it needs to be done from the
perspective of the poor and from within the church, the
eschatological body of Christ.

I would propose that this identification with the poor
and the adoption of an eschatological hermeneutic arising
out of a christological epistemology which will enable South
African evangelicals to make use of the strengths of New
Westminster theology and overcome its weaknesses in the

search for a relevant contextual theology.

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Notes to Chapter V.

1 An attempt to do that would require greater dialogue with other models of theologising such as Liberation Theology, African theology and some of the post modern Western theologies. It would require intense interaction with South African theological trends, particularly the work done by groups such as Concerned Evangelicals.

2 Poythress, V.S., <u>Understanding Dispensationalists</u>, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987), p.70.

3 Concerned Evangelicals, <u>Evangelical Witness in South Africa. Evangelicals Critique their own Theology and Practice.</u> (Dobsonville, Concerned Evangelicals, 1986). Kairos Theologians, <u>The Kairos Document - Challenge to the Church</u> (Braamfontein, Skotaville, 1986) and <u>The Road to Damascus - Kairos and Conversion</u> (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1989).

4 Theological and ecclesiological triumphalism is the attitude "that my particular group and theology is right and all others are wrong." It is accompanied by a striving to dominate the church and society. While Frame's multiperspectival approach undermines certain strains of triumphalism, an unguarded use of his concept of lordship could lead to it. Such triumphalism has often characterised some members of the reformed tradition and is particularly evident in the Christian Reconstruction Movement. See J.W. De Gruchy, <u>Liberating Reformed Theology - A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 18-20 and N. Wolterstorff, <u>Until Justice and Peace Embrace</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), p. 9. Examples of such triumphalism can be seen in J. Jordan, <u>Sociology of the Church - Essays in Reconstruction</u> (Tyler, Geneva Ministries, 1986), and in many of the writings of Gary North. See for example his <u>Westminster's Confession - The Abandonment of the Van Til Legacy</u> (Tyler, Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

5 This is in contrast to the christological epistemology of Calvin and that of the Reformed Scholastics of E.A. Dowey, <u>The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology</u> (New York, Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 149-204 and 221-222, and T.H.L. Parker, <u>Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 100-116, and R.J. Muller, <u>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</u>, Vol. 1: <u>Prolegomena to Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987), p. 145 166.

6 He defends this practice as a useful theological shorthand if one understands the meaning of the passage in its context. J.M. Frame, <u>The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</u> (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), p. 187. Yet in this case he seems to fail to interpret the concept

"Word" in its context and then uses it by linking it with other proof texts. It seems particularly important when one is introducing a new theological understanding which one claims is based on Scripture, to defend and expound it exegetically. Frame does engage in careful exegesis when he sees this as necessary. See, for example, "The Doctrine of the Christian Life" (lecture outline), pp. 52-57.

7 P. Cotterell and M. Turner argue on a linguistic basis that the concept of "Word" in John 1 is not to be seen as synonymous with other references to "Word", even in the Johannine literature. This passage is best understood in relation to other christological passages such as Col. 1:15-20 which emphasise the mediatorship of Christ. See Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), pp. 120-122.

8 See Parker, pp 61-69.

9 Contemporary evangelicals such as Ronald Nash have emphasised this point. See The Word of God and the Mind of Men (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1982), p. 59-69. They have used this concept in a fairly intellectualistic fashion.

10 Such a view would need to be related to a careful understanding of the "filioque" concept.

11 See A. Konig, Jesus die Laaste (Pretoria, N.G. Kerk Boekhandel, 1980), pp. 7-38, who argues that the entire history of Christ is to be understood eschatologically.

12 See, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Ephesians 2:7 & 10 and Colossians 1:19 & 20.

13 See passages such as 1 Peter 1:7, 4:13 and 1 John 3:2.

14 See Revelation 21 and 22.

15 This has been argued from an evangelical perspective by W J. Dumbrell in Covenant and Creation - An Old Testament Covenant Theology (Exeter, Paternoster, 1984) and The Faith of Israel - Its Expression in the Books of the Old Testament (Leicester, Apollos - Inter-Varsity Press, 1987).

16 This is argued by Konig on pp. 74-77.

17 This is argued by Martin Luther in his "Heidelberg Disputation" in Luthers Works. vol 31: Career of the Reformer (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1957), 39-70 and by A. McGrath, The Enigma of the Cross (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987).

18 This is particularly true in the context of human

suffering. Some contemporary South African theologians have placed a major emphasis on this concept. See, for example, J.W. de Gruchy, <u>Theology and Ministry in Crises and Context - A South African Perspective</u> (London, Collins, 1987), pp. 96-124 and T.A. Mofokeng, <u>The Crucified Among the Crossbearers - Towards a Black Christology</u> (Kampen, J.H. Kok 1983), pp. 256-263.

19 C. Van Til, <u>A Survey of Christian Epistemology</u> (Nutley, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), pp. 65-80 and <u>The Defence of the Faith</u> (Phillipsberg, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), pp. 16 & 17.

20 I was unable to find any discussion of this issue in Frame's writings.

21 J.M.Frame, <u>Evangelical Reunion Denominations and the Body of Christ</u> (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1991), pp. 94 & 95 and V.S. Poythress, <u>Symphonic Theology - The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology</u> (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987), pp. 90 & 91.

22 This is in contrast to the Van Tilian emphasis on the self-contained ontological and an infallible Bible as the basic presuppositions of theology. These doctrines ought to be built on the foundation of the cross.

23 J. Calvin, <u>The Gospel according to St. John 11-21 and The First Epistle of John</u>, trans. T.H.L. Parker, eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1959), p. 211.

24 W. J. Dumbrell argues that there is a close relationship between covenant understood as God's relationship with and purpose for the whole of creation, and the concept of the image of God. Where this is understood eschatologically, both concepts find their focus in Christ. See Dumbrell, <u>Covenant</u>, pp 33-39.

25 J. Calvin, <u>Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis</u>, trans. J. King (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 295 & 296.

26 P. E. Hughes, <u>The True Image - The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1984), p. 341. Hughes strongly affirms the creator-creature distinction. See p148-149.

27 The position adopted by Calvin that by virtue of unity of the person, what is properly ascribed to one nature is improperly ascribed to the other, is not really open to Frame. It attempts to get behind Scripture to its meaning which is then used to contradict the text. See J. Calvin, <u>Institutes</u>, 2:14:2. The problematic nature of Calvin's solution can be seen in Frame's critique of Hodge's

understanding of theology. See <u>Knowledge of God</u>, pp. 77-81.
Compare Poythress' statement that "Philosophical reasoning
has often tried to get "behind" the Bible into some deeper
speculative knowledge of God. This attempt always turns out
in practice to be a way of giving human reason autonomy to
dictate to the Bible which of its parts to be taken
seriously and which are mere metaphors or "accommodations"
for the common people". <u>Symphonic Theology</u>, p 50.

28   See Frame, <u>Van Til The Theologian</u> (Chattanooga,
Pilgrim, 1976), pp. 8-13 and 28-31.

29 An additional difficulty here is the relationship
between the New Westminster Theology and the orthodox
Calvinistic idea of the divine decree in which God is seen to
decree what is contrary to His command. On the one hand, the
relationship between fact and interpretation as expounded by
Frame arises out of this concept. On the other hand, it
renders the correlation between God's control and His
authority extremely problematic, if not impossible. I would
suggest that this tension can be adequately solved if God's
sovereignty is not conceived of as being such "that nothing
whatsoever can happen that is not in accord with the will of
God" but rather" that nothing whatsoever can happen that can
defeat the will of God" (Hughes p. 153). As such, God's
sovereignty must be understood eschatologically. Such a
formulation does not eliminate the mystery of the
relationship between divine sovereignty, human
responsibility and the presence of evil. It does, however,
move away from the danger of determinism implicit in
orthodox Calvinism.

30 "The Belhar Confession" Section 4 in G.D. Cloete and
D.A. Smit eds., <u>A Moment of Truth</u> (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,
1984), 1-6 (p. 3).

31 This is a valid conclusion whether one views the
references to "gods" as relating to human judges or to other
gods.   In both cases the distinguishing character of
godliness is the pursuit of justice.

32 This has been argued in detail by R.J. Sider, in
<u>Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger</u> (London, Hodder and
Stoughton, 1990), pp. 48-56. For an analysis written in the
South African context see D.S. Walker in "Radical
Evangelicalism and the Poor" (Ph.D. thesis University of
Natal, 1990), pp. 78-117.

33 This failure is compounded by a very shallow economic
analysis of poverty and a failure to see that poverty in the
contemporary world and in the Bible is in the vast majority
of cases the consequence of oppression. See Walker p 60-117.

34 H.M.Conn, <u>Eternal Word and Changing Worlds</u> -
<u>Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Triologue</u> (Grand

Rapids, Zondervan, 1984), p. 255.

35 "The Belhar Confession", Section 4, p 3 & 4.

36 Conn, p 255.

37 G.R. Lewis and B. A. Demarest Integrative Theology, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1987), pp. 9 & 10.

38 Conn and Walker have attempted to describe some of these characteristics. See Conn, pp. 253-260 and Walker, pp. 131-138 and 176-295.

39 De Gruchy gives a detailed exposition of these and other qualifications. De Gruchy, Liberating Reformed Theology, pp. 78-83.

40 The question of the legitimacy of this position lies beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the adequacy of his emphasis on the cognitive dimension of the authority of the Bible is questionable. He seems to equate submission to the authority of the Bible with an acceptance of an evangelical understanding of its authority and possibly even an acceptance of inerrancy. He rejects digressions from this position as unbelief and, therefore, liberalism and neo-orthodoxy are seen to be humanism in Christian disguise. See Evangelical Reunion, pp. 93 & 167. This contrasts with his emphasis on the many-faceted character of biblical authority. As Carl Ellis has pointed out, while evangelicals have emphasised the cognitive dimension of biblical authority, often those who have been labelled liberal have been more consistent in obeying the teaching of the Bible. See C.F. Ellis, Beyond Liberation - The Gospel in Black American Experience (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), pp. 79 & 80.

41 The issue here is not the question of inerrancy but is rather to be seen in the relationship between God's Word and the socio-historical context into which it comes. While Frame recognises that the biblical revelation is accommodated, he tends to link the form and the content of God's revelation very closely, resulting in an absolutising of dimensions of the socio-historical context. His view of Scripture as the ultimate presupposition of a Christian's thinking leads him to attempt to justify a large number of practices with an explicit biblical reference. This results in his seeking normative answers to questions which the Bible does not address. When there is no clear normative direction from the Bible, he tends to draw them from incidental details or particulars of the socio-cultural context to which the text refers. In dealing with issues where the Bible does seem to give answers he does not wrestle adequately with the issue of to what extent these norms refer to the particular context in which they were given. This whole issue is complicated by his tendency to

use proof texts rather than to give a detailed exegesis.

42 Frame is not alone in this. While the so called "Battle for the Bible" has produced volumes on the nature and use of Scripture, the issue of accommodation has received attention in only a limited sense. It has been used by those not holding to inerrancy to explain the phenomena of Scripture, thus causing those who do hold to inerrancy to concentrate their attention on this issue. There has also been limited discussion on the legitimacy and adequacy of the use of human language to convey God's revelation. See J.M. Frame, "God and Biblical Language" in God's Inerrant Word – An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture, edited by J. W. Montgomery (Minneopolis, Bethany, 1973), 159-177, and Knowledge of God p. 24 and V.S. Poythress, "Adequacy of Language and Accommodation" in Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible, edited by E.D. Radmacher and R.D. Preus (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984) 351-37. More recently, the issue of culture has come to the fore in missiological discussions about contextualisation and in the growing debate in evangelical circles about women's issues. Conn's writings on these subjects provide some of the guidelines for the following section.

43 It is notable that members of the Westminster faculty were pioneers in using this kind of approach to historical books, recognising that the authors were using this data for specific purposes and were not merely recording history. See H. M. Conn, "A Historical Prologue – Inerrancy, Hermeneutic and Westminster" in Inerrancy and Hermeneutic – A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988) edited by H.M. Conn, 15-34 (pp. 21-27) and M. A. Noll, Between Faith and Criticism – Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible (Leicester, Apollos – Inter-Varsity, 1991), pp. 107-109.

44 J.G. McConville, "The Shadow of the Curse : A "Key" to Old Testament Theology" Evangel 13:1 (1987), 39-57 (p. 2). His argument is obviously dependent on the assumption "that the story of creation, disobedience, curse, judgment (flood), scattering (Babel) and election (Abraham) stand necessarily and as a unity in its place of priority in the Bible."

45 H.M. Conn, "Feminist Theology" in New Dictionary of Theology edited by S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (Leicester, Inter-Varsity, 1988), pp. 255-258 (pp. 256 and 257).

46 Conn, "Feminist Theology", pp 257 & 258, "Normativity, Relevance and Relativism" in Inerrancy and Hermeneutic – A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate edited by H.M. Conn (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988), pp. 185-209 (pp. 199-201).

47 D. Clowney, "The Use of the Bible in Ethics" in
Inerrrancy and Hermeneutic - A Tradition, A Challenge, A
Debate edited by H.M. Conn (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1988)
pp. 211-236 (pp 223-224 & 227-232).

48 A similar approach is used by R. N. Longenecker in
New Testament Social Ethics for Today (Grand Rapids,
Eerdmans, 1984).

49 Conn, Eternal Word, pp. 235-241.

50 Frame, Knowledge of God, pp. 158-160 and V.S.
Poythress, Science and Hermeneutics - Implications of
Scientif Method of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids,
Zondervan, 1988) pp. 79-81 & 167-168, and
Dispensationalists, pp. 57-65. It is, however, noticeable
that Frame's discussion of the causes of denominationalism in
Evangelical Reunion does not refer to sociological
factors other than those relating to the ethnic origins of
certain denominations.

51 Conn, Eternal Word, p. 255.

52 David Lyon and Richard Perkins have both argued for
the validity of doing sociology within the context of a
Christian world view. See D. Lyon, Sociology and the Human
Image (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), and R. Perkins
Looking Both Ways - Exploring the Interface between
Christianity and Sociology (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987).
David Lyon draws on Nicholas Wolterstorff's proposal that
Christians should let their faith influence the
determination of the "control" beliefs of their particular
discipline. See N. Wolterstorff, Reason Within the Bounds of
Religion (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 71-97.

53 This of course raises the issue of the influence of
society on the production of the biblical text. An
evaluation of the issues involved here would take us beyond
the confines of the task of this thesis. It is, however,
necessary to affirm that an organic view of the inspiration
of scripture includes a recognition of these factors. God
in His sovereignty controlled the history, context,
interests and intentions of the authors so that what they
wrote was perfectly His Word although it reflected the
writer's personality and ideas within their socio-
historical context. See R.L. Pratt, He Gave us Stories -
The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament
Narratives (Brentwood, Wolgmuth and Hyatt, 1990),
pp. 108-111.

54 Frame, Knowledge of God, pp. 158-160.

55 Perkins, pp. 90 & 91.

56 This is not, however, "perspectival relationship".

57 See 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5.

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