

TWELVE POINTS OF LIGHT

INTRODUCTION

The issue of theology is not only for academics but of central import to every Christian. A look back into history reminds one of the crucial issues addressed and defined in terms which allows the Church to stand on solid theological foundations. *Twelve Points of Light* is my attempt to select twelve key periods in the history of Christianity. There are so many others events that have impacted our lives, as well. This study is designed to enlighten our minds to the richness of God's grace to us throughout the Church Age.

Today, doing theology and doing it well is as important as ever. Some issues have changed but some are being studied anew with frightening consequences. Leith Anderson clearly notes, "*One of the greatest values of theological education is learning from the past as a preventive against becoming heterodox in the future.*"

Church leaders and elders must be especially careful to be theologically minded. Great responsibility has been placed on us by Scripture. Paul declared in Titus 1:9, that an elder is to be *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.* Ted Kitchens notes that *for pastors and church elders the standard is more rigid since, they are especially responsible to teach and defend the whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27).

We are accountable to do good theology. Often, it is a responsibility avoided due to fear of failure. Charles Spurgeon rightly declared, *The way to defend the Bible is the same way you defend a lion. You just let it loose.* Our responsibility is to feed on the Word which will not only nourish us but those God has called us to serve. Douglas McLachlan rightly observes, *Emaciated women cannot give birth to healthy children. Neither can emaciated Christians.*

Of course, the study of theology must always be tempered by the realization of our own human frailties. Donald McCullough rightly states, *The theological enterprise demands humility as much as critical thinking.* Our cognitive abilities are limited but our faculties for obedience must be stretched. Note Alister McGrath, *Doctrinal orthodoxy without a living faith is like an empty treasure chest; it awaits the riches for which it was intended, yet lacks that richness itself.*" On one side, we have limited knowledge but on the other we limit our response. Theology can and must spur us on to know and obey better. That is a pursuit well-pleasing to God.

The following outline is an attempt to address the context of the first point of light. May God richly bless us as we seek to know what we believe.

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A. Perspectives on theology

1. Importance in history

- a. 1st century: Council of Jerusalem - Soteriology, affirmed universal nature of Gospel, for Jews and Gentiles.
- b. 2nd to 4th centuries: Bibliology and Christology, focused on the Bible canon, nature of Christ and His relationship to the Godhead.
- c. 11th century: Pneumatology, split between East and West over the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Son.
- d. 16th century: Bibliology -Soteriology, affirmed the priority of Scripture and salvation by faith alone.

2. Importance today

- a. Leith Anderson, *One of the greatest values of theological education is learning from the past as a preventive against heterodoxy in the future.*
- b. Thomas Oden, *God allows heresies to challenge the church in order to bring us to a fuller understanding of the truth.*
- c. Darrell Bock, *Even though we are redeemed, we still have fallen minds. We still make judgments that are sometimes wrong, so we need to do our theology with humility. And if we emphasize what Scripture emphasizes, we are going to have a better chance of getting it right than if we pick areas of interest to us just because they're fascinating.*
- d. The study of theology must spur us on to know God better so we can obey Him more fully.

3. Importance of Christology

- a. Personal illustration
- b. Preeminent truth - the work of Christ depends on the person of Christ.
- c. Perennial confusion
 - 1) Jesus was the evil priest of Qumran who eloped with Mary Magdalene and survived crucifixion by drinking snake poison. "Barbara Thiering, "Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls."
 - 2) Marcus Borg, *Jesus was a charismatic shaman, Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time.*
 - 3) Benny Hinn, *If I can shock you—and maybe I should—there are nine of them (persons in the Trinity).*
 - 4) Kenneth Copeland, *They crucified Me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim I was God. I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah.*

B. Background

1. Historical

- a. The 4th Century Church moved from persecution to privilege.
- b. Emperor Constantine hoped that Christianity would be "the cement of the Empire."
- c. Benefits
 - 1) More time given to theological study.
 - 2) Era of great Fathers of the Church: Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Jerome, and Augustine.
 - 3) First historian of Christianity, Eusebius of Caesarea.
- b. Problems
 - 1) Mass conversions detracted from the depth of conviction and the moral life of the church.
 - 2) Hope of imminent return of Christ waned.
 - 3) Imperial protection also meant the possibility of imperial intervention in theological issues.

2. Theological

- a. Heresies emerged as men sought to explain the relationship of God to Jesus.
- b. Key heresies leading to the Council of Nicea
 - 1) Arianism (issue of deity)
 - a) Jesus is not preexistent but the first-born of all creation.
 - b) He was created by the Father and then Christ created the universe.
 - c) He is not equal with God in essence or eternity.
 - d) Verses used in support, Mark 13:32; John 5:19; 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:28
 - 2) Docetism (issue of humanity)
 - a) Dualistic system: spirit and flesh.
 - b) Flesh was considered evil so God could not become flesh.
 - c) Jesus appeared human but was actually divine.
 - d) They had gnostic tendencies (special knowledge).
 - 3) Monarchianism (issue of polytheism)
 - a) Emphasized the unity of God but denied Trinity which was perceived as Tritheism.
 - b) The unity of God denotes both oneness of nature and oneness of person.
 - c) Sabellius taught that the Persons of the Godhead were modes in which God manifested Himself.
 - d) Tertullian (ca. 165-220) battled Monarchianism and was the first to use the word Trinity.