

This *Grand Rapids Theological Seminary Guideline for Papers and Theses* is binding upon all seminary assignments. Drawing heavily from *The S.B.L. Handbook of Style* and Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, sixth edition, this guide supplies instructions and examples to help students complete their written assignments. For questions not addressed in this guide, please consult Turabian or the *S.B.L. Handbook*.

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I. THE PROPER METHOD FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

The task of writing a research paper consists of two parts: research and writing. Each component possesses its own method, which is described below. Those students who diligently learn and apply the following method will succeed in their graduate education.

A. Research

1. Research Topic

You can not begin to research until you have an appropriate topic. How do you locate a topic? Skim a few relevant books or articles for ideas and then check with your professor. Before you begin research in earnest, you must:

a) Develop a focused, narrow topic. Most student papers that fail do so at this first step. Students commonly select topics that are too broad for their page limit. As a result, their papers are blandly general, unable to assert anything significant about their topic. Check with your professor. He can help you to limit your topic to a manageable level.

b) State your focused topic in the form of a question. This is the initial form of your thesis, your reason for writing the paper. You have a burning desire to answer this question. You must know the answer, and think others should want to know also. If your passion is not this strong, fake it and wait until next semester and the new round of research papers.

c) Create a tentative outline. It is permissible to alter this later, but you should have some idea about how your paper will go before you begin your research. Think in large categories. What other questions must you answer in order to answer your thesis question? These questions most likely represent the large sections of your paper. How do these questions relate to the thesis question and to each other? Arrange them in logical order. Now you are ready to go to the library. As you read, make sure to cluster your discoveries around this set of questions. If done properly, the paper will nearly write itself when your research is complete.

2. Research Tools

a) Always work from primary sources. A primary source is a source that is directly lodged in a specific topic, time, and place. A secondary source is a source that is indirectly lodged in a specific topic, time, and place. In other words, a primary source is itself the focus of your paper, while a secondary source is a document that comments on the primary source. For example, for an exegetical study of Romans 1, the book of Romans is the primary source and Calvin's commentary on Romans is a secondary source. If your paper is about Calvin's exegesis of Romans 1, then Calvin's commentary becomes a primary source, and essays written on Calvin's exegesis are secondary sources.

Graduate papers should never merely recite secondary sources, i.e., what others have said about a given topic. Never take another person's word for it, but always check the original source yourself. Libraries contain many books by less than responsible scholars. Some lazily pass along information they read second or third hand. Since they did not bother to check the original source, they may be repeating incorrect information without even knowing it. Avoid this mistake by checking the original source for yourself.

b) Always use journal articles and critical essays in your research. These sources are likely to contain focused and often current information on your topic. To locate these sources, use the various databases, especially ATLA, in Firstsearch.

3. Research Notes

This is often the drudgery of doing research. Creating note cards is time consuming, but doing them right can actually save time in the long run. Here is a simple rule to live by: never read the same source twice. Doing so is a waste of time. To avoid reading the same source twice you must write down all crucial passages the first time. Hence the need for note cards. If you are convinced that note cards are important, make them like this:

a) Use half sheets or large index cards. Alternately, a terrific time saver is to record notes on a computer, inserting page breaks between notes. These notes may then be printed and arranged according to your outline. When it comes time to write, you may only need to cut and paste material within your computer rather than retyping it into your paper.

b) Only write on one side of the page. While the desire to save trees and money is admirable, it is not worth the pain you will feel when you desperately flip over note cards to find that key quotation you know you wrote down somewhere.

c) Keep the notes relatively small per page. The likelihood that a single page of notes may be used in two or more sections of your paper increases exponentially with the amount of notes on the page. You do not want to begin tearing your note cards in half or thirds so you can distribute them throughout your outline. Keep life simple by keeping your note cards simple.

d) Write the theme or topic which the notes address on the top of the page. Immediately underneath this list the source from which it comes. Full bibliographical data is preferred (remember our rule above: you do not want to revisit the library because you forgot the publishing date of a source or failed to record the name of the monograph series or total volumes in the multi-volume work). A computer is convenient here, for you can cut and paste or program a macro for the bibliographical information. If doing this the old fashioned way, I recommend numbering the books in your bibliography. Then simply write the

number for your source on the top of each note card. A quick check to your master bibliography will inform you of the source of each note card. Remember to list the page numbers for your notes on the card itself, for your bibliography will not have this information.

e) Either way, you should carefully compile your bibliography as you collect your notes (because you never want to read the same source twice).

B. Writing

1. Preparing to Write

The occasional drudgery of research is over. The fun part is coming, for you are now entering the writing phase. Before you actually begin typing, there are a couple things to do first.

a) Change your thesis question into a thesis statement. This is easily done. Simply write your answer (which your research discovered) next to your thesis question, and then write one concise statement that incorporates both elements. While it sometimes works best to leave your thesis as a question, allowing the body of the paper to inductively answer it, for our purposes it is usually better to begin the paper with a thesis statement. Most readers and professors want to know up front what your paper asserts, and a thesis statement best accomplishes this.

b) Create your final outline, with detailed subpoints. This outline is not quite set in stone, for you may need to slightly alter it as you write the paper. However, the central ideas should be here, with note cards gathered around them. If you spend time on this step, your paper will come easily. Simply write the paper to the outline, and before you know it you will done.

2. Writing the Paper

There are four keys to writing a fine paper, assuming that it has been sufficiently researched. Here they are, in order of importance.

a) Outline. The outline is essential because it tells you what you are trying to say. If you can not outline your paper, you do not yet know what you intend to communicate. And if you do not know, the odds are long against your readers figuring it out. Most won't even try.

b) Transitions. These are key words, phrases, or even sentences that connect the points of your outline. These are essential because they tell your reader what you are trying to say. Most writers who lose readers do so in the movement between points. Although the writer may know how his ideas connect, most readers will not unless they are told. Even if they could, most readers resent the burden of having to connect the writer's thoughts for him. This is especially true if the paper happens to

be the tenth one that the professor has graded that day. A helpful tip here is to give your paper to a friend to read. The spots where your friend becomes lost are places that need a clearer transition. Examples of useful transitions include: first, second, third, etc., not only...but also, besides, nevertheless, however, furthermore, and moreover.

c) Introduction. First impressions are crucial. We form strong images of people within three seconds of meeting them. A good professor can size up a paper in ten. The professor will be looking for your thesis statement on the first page or two. Give it to him. You gain nothing from the element of surprise if you spring it on him on page eight. Papers which do not state their thesis somewhere in the introduction are not A papers. Ever.

While the thesis statement is the most vital part of the introduction, the introduction's first function is to present the need for the paper. Begin every paper by explaining to the reader why your topic is important. If appropriate for your topic, advanced students may accomplish this by introducing their papers with a survey of scholarship. This survey amounts to relating the various positions on your topic. Briefly state who holds what position and why, and then give your take on the topic, which is your thesis statement.

Before leaving the introduction, briefly outline the paper for your readers. The best introductions assert a thesis and then describe how the paper will defend or develop it. If the body of the paper accomplishes what such an introduction promises, it will invariably receive an A.

Other items that may be appropriate for an introduction include any relevant presuppositions or methodological considerations that have influenced the paper's conclusions. Much of this will be implied in your thesis statement and outline, but sometimes you may find it helpful to be explicit about the nature of your work.

d) Conclusion. The conclusion should briefly restate the thesis and review the main points that support it. It may end with a witty note or application, though this is not necessary (unless called for in the assignment). The one thing you should never do is introduce new material in the conclusion. If you have something crucial to say that does not fit into your outline, resist the temptation to inject it right before you say good-bye. Either throw it away or make a new outline.

Of course, this entire research methodology assumes that two fundamental facts are true. First, it assumes that students are disciplined enough to start their research projects early in the semester. This is essential, for every writer needs incubation time between his first draft and subsequent revisions. Ideally, the first draft will be completed two weeks before it is due. This lag time enables the writer to put the paper aside for a few days, returning to it later with fresh eyes. Good papers are not written. They are rewritten. Almost without exception, no paper is worth turning in until at least its third revision.

Second, it assumes that students possess basic writing skills and a working knowledge of English grammar and syntax. Unfortunately, this is not always the

case. Students who find themselves deficient in this area should consult a grammar text. A standard refresher tool is William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1959; third edition, 1979). Every writer, from beginner to the professional, will learn much from reading Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Besides reading these two books, your writing will improve if you write for your ear. If you are not sure if a sentence is correct, try reading it aloud. If you run out of air before you run out of sentence, you can be certain that you have a run-on. If the sentence stops before you are ready, you can be certain that you have a fragment. Your ear is also able to catch such miscues as improper verb tense or disagreement between subjects and verbs. While none of our ears are perfect, most of us speak English well enough that we can trust our ears to spot and solve problem areas.

One more thing: while no one wants to read or write pompous prose, we do insist that your writing avoid a conversational tone. Never use second person pronouns (you). First person is acceptable (we, I) and third person is most often the best (he, she, it, one).

II. ELEMENTS OF THE PAPER

A. Front Matter

The normal top margin for papers is one inch. However, except for the title page and table of contents, all initial pages in the front matter should have a two inch margin at the top.

1. Title Page: The title page should conform to example 14.18 in Turabian (see example below). Although this title page is page i, the number does not appear on it.
2. Copyright or blank page: All masters theses must either have a copyright page or a blank page following the title page. Although this is page ii, the number does not appear on it. Students should use the following format:

Copyright © 2000 by John Doe
All rights reserved

3. Dedication (optional): If included, a dedication should be brief (e.g., “To John”). Although this is page iii, the number does not appear on it.
4. Epigraph (optional): An epigraph is a quotation that foreshadows the theme of the work. Only use an epigraph if the quotation is particularly appropriate for the thesis. Although this page counts in the page numbering, the number does not appear on it.
5. Table of Contents: The table of contents page should conform to example 14.19 in Turabian (see example below). It should have a one inch top margin. The table of contents lists each part of the paper or thesis except the title page, copyright or blank page, dedication page, and epigraph, which precede it. The table of contents must identify all chapters and sections of the work with identical wording and capitalization used in the body of the paper. It should also identify the beginning page number for each chapter and section. Beginning with the first page of the table of contents, each subsequent page of the front matter should be numbered with lowercase Roman numerals in the bottom center of the page.
6. Preface or Acknowledgments (optional): The preface explains the motivation or context for the study. It may also acknowledge those people and institutions that contributed to the paper. If the author only wishes to do the latter, then this page should be titled ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. The preface should not exceed two pages.

7. Abbreviations (optional): An abbreviation page is needed if the author has used them throughout his work. Arrange the list alphabetically by the abbreviation rather than by the full term or title. This page should conform to the example 14.32 in Turabian. See *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 68-152, for a comprehensive list of abbreviations for biblical, primary, and secondary sources.
8. Abstract: No longer than 200 words, the abstract should briefly summarize the main point of the thesis. It should explain the problem which the thesis addressed and its proposed solution. A clear and concise abstract will enable another scholar to quickly ascertain whether he should read the thesis.

B. Main Text

The first page of each chapter should center the chapter title in uppercase type two inches from the top of the paper. Subsequent pages of each chapter should have only a one inch margin at the top.

The first page of each chapter should center its page number in the bottom margin. Subsequent pages of each chapter should place their page numbers flush with the text on the right side of the top margin.

1. Introduction: The introduction is chapter one. This chapter explains the context of the problem to be studied, surveys the scholarship on the topic, and briefly outlines the thesis, its supporting points, and its contribution to scholarship. The first page of the introduction is page one of the paper. From this point, the pagination throughout the paper and the back matter should use Arabic numerals.
2. Body of the Paper: The body of the paper develops and defends the paper's thesis as outlined in the introduction. It is divided into chapters, which in turn are divided into sections and subsections.
3. Conclusion: The conclusion should summarize the thesis and its salient points, noting areas for further study. While all papers should have a conclusion, it need not comprise its own individual chapter. If the conclusion is brief, it may be identified as an epilogue or afterword.

C. Back Matter

The first page of each section should have a top margin of two inches. Subsequent pages of each section should have a top margin of one inch.

Continue the Arabic numeral pagination from the body of the paper into the back matter.

1. Appendix or Appendices (optional): An appendix supplies material that is relevant to the paper but not suitable to be included within it. Two or more appendices should be enumerated by numbers or letters (e.g., Appendix 1, Appendix 2, etc. or Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.).

2. Bibliography: The paper should conclude by listing the important works that contributed to its completion. The bibliography should not include every work that might possibly relate to the topic, but only those that the student actually used. Its heading should be in uppercase type and should read SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY or WORKS CITED. The bibliography may be a single list, arranged alphabetically by author, or it may be divided into sections, either by subject or category (e.g., primary and secondary works). See example below.

III. FORMAT AND STYLE WITHIN THE PAPER

A. Appearance of the Paper

1. Paper Quality: All theses should be printed on twenty pound bond or heavier acid free paper with a watermark. The page dimensions must be 8½ by 11 inches.
2. Typeface: Consistently employ either Times New Roman or Courier font throughout the paper. Use twelve point font for the body of the text and ten point font for footnotes.
3. Margins:
 - a. Left: 1.25"
 - b. Right, Bottom, and Top: 1"
 - c. Exceptions:
 - 1) table of contents: 1" top margin
 - 2) initial page of chapters and sections in front and back matter: 2" top margin

All material, including page numbers, must fall within these margins. For example, a page requiring a one inch margin should measure one inch from the top edge of the page to the top of the page number.

Left margins should be justified; right margins should be left ragged (unjustified).

4. Spacing: The entire paper must be double-spaced except chapter headings, long quotations (single-spaced), and footnotes (single-spaced within the note and double-spaced between notes).
5. Pagination
 - a. Front matter: use lower case Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.) centered in the bottom margin. The title page, copyright or blank page, dedication page, and epigraph do not display page numbers, though they are counted in the pagination for front matters.
 - b. Body of the paper and back matter: use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) at the top right hand margin, separated by the text by one blank line (most software programs do this automatically). The initial page of each chapter or section in the back matter should center its page number in the bottom margin. The first page of the first chapter is page one.
6. Indentation: Paragraphs are indented ten spaces. Block quotations are indented five spaces.
7. Emphasis: either underline or use italics for emphasis. No paper should contain both underline and italics.

8. Headings: Carefully mark each major section of the paper with its own numbered heading, giving greater attention value to higher level headings. Centering, boldface, underlining, and italicizing are good methods to give greater attention value to headings. Here is the preferred model for delineating sections (see 1.37 in Turabian for another style):

- a. Chapter title: centered, double-spaced heading in uppercase type. If the title is longer than forty-eight characters, it is set in two or more lines in inverted pyramid form.

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TITLE IN UPPERCASE AND FORMATTED

IN INVERTED PYRAMID FORM

- b. First-level subheading:

I. Centered and Italicized or Underlined

- c. Second-level subheading:

A. Centered But Not Italicized or Underlined

- d. Third-level subheading:

1. Flush With the Left Margin and Italicized or Underlined

- e. Fourth-level subheading:

a. Flush With the Left Margin But Not Italicized or Underlined

- f. Fifth-level subheading:

Paragraph indented, lowercase, and italicized or underlined. A period follows a fifth level subheading which is then immediately followed by text (as in this example).

Note: All headings and subheadings should come in pairs. No level may have a lone heading. There must be text between levels of subheadings. Do not place one subheading immediately after another. Subheadings at the bottom of a page must include at least two lines of subsequent text, otherwise the subheading must be moved to the top of the next page.

B. Documentation within the Paper

1. Abbreviations: See *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 68-152, for a comprehensive list of abbreviations for biblical, primary, and secondary sources.
2. Quotations
 - a. Be careful not to quote too often from others, especially secondary sources. It is better to paraphrase another author in one's own words unless the quotation is essential to the paper's argument or especially poignant.
 - b. Direct quotations of prose should be enclosed within quotation marks. Quotations of two or more sentences that exceed four lines of text is set off as a single-spaced, indented block (five spaces from the left margin), with no quotation marks preceding or following it. If the block quotation includes the beginning of a paragraph, indent the first line of the paragraph an additional five spaces.
 - c. Place periods and commas within quotation marks. Question marks, dashes, and exclamation points that are not part of the original quotation are placed outside the quotation marks. Semicolons and colons are also placed outside quotation marks.
 - d. Indicate any omission from a quotation with ellipsis points (...). Punctuation that occurs immediately before or after the omitted material should appear just before or after the ellipsis points. A brief phrase should not have ellipsis points because it is already clear that it is an incomplete sentence. A block quotation should not have ellipsis points at the beginning and should have ellipsis points at the end only if the quotation does not end with a complete sentence.
 - e. If anything is added to a quotation, such as a corrected spelling or name or term that clarifies the quotation, it must be enclosed in square brackets.
 - f. If italics is added to emphasize part of the quotation, the addition must be indicated with a comment such as "emphasis added" either in a footnote or in parentheses following the quotation.
3. Footnotes
 - a. Footnotes are not only used for direct quotations, but anytime an idea is acquired from another source. Footnotes are necessary even when one is paraphrasing another.
 - b. Footnotes rather than endnotes should be used for all papers.

- c. Footnotes are usually numbered consecutively within a chapter, with each chapter beginning with footnote number one.
- d. Footnotes are single-spaced, with one blank line between footnotes. The first line of each footnote must be indented the same number of spaces as the paragraphs within the body of the paper.
- e. The first citation of any work must be a complete citation. Subsequent references to the same work may simply cite the author's last name, key initial words from the title, and page number. We discourage the use of *ibid.*, as revisions to a paper may easily displace footnotes and lose the *ibid.*'s original antecedent.

4. Sample footnotes and bibliography

The following examples list the proper forms for the first mention of a source in footnotes, its second mention, and its appearance in the bibliography. For examples not covered here, see *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 46-67 and Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 185-238.

a. A book by a single author

¹John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 99.

¹Piper, *God's Passion*, 117.

Piper, John. *God's Passion for His Glory*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998.

b. A book by two or three authors

¹J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 100.

¹Middleton and Walsh, *The Transforming Vision*, 110.

Middleton, J. Richard, and Brian J. Walsh. *The Transforming Vision*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984.

c. A translated volume

¹Abraham Kuyper, *You Can Do Greater Things Than Christ: Demons, Miracles, Healing, and Science* (transl. Jan H. Boer; Jos, Nigeria: Institute of Church and Society, 1991): 45.

¹Kuyper, *You Can Do Greater Things*, 65.

Kuyper, Abraham. *You Can Do Greater Things Than Christ: Demons, Miracles, Healing, and Science*. Translated by Jan H. Boer. Jos, Nigeria: Institute of Church and Society, 1991.

d. A book with author, editor, and translator

¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II,1: *The Doctrine of God* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; trans. T.H.L. Parker, W.B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J.L.M. Haire; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 257.

¹Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II,1:257.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II,1: *The Doctrine of God*. Edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. Translated by T.H.L. Parker, W.B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J.L.M. Haire. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957.

e. An article in an edited volume

¹Allan W. Eister, "H. Richard Niebuhr and the Paradox of Religious Organization: A Radical Critique," in *Beyond the Classics?* (ed. Charles Y. Glock and Phillip E. Hammond; New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 358.

¹Eister, "H. Richard Niebuhr," 358.

Eister, Allan W. "H. Richard Niebuhr and the Paradox of Religious Organization: A Radical Critique." Pages 355-408 in *Beyond the Classics?* Edited by Charles Y. Glock and Phillip E. Hammond. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

f. An introduction, preface, or foreword written by someone other than the author

¹James Gustafson, introduction to *The Responsible Self*, by H. Richard Niebuhr (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 29.

¹Gustafson, "Introduction," 29.

Gustafson, James. Introduction to *The Responsible Self*, by H. Richard Niebuhr. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

g. A recent reprint title

¹William Jones, *The Hour Has Struck* (New York: Doubleday, 1945; repr., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1995), 16.

¹Jones, *The Hour Has Struck*, 16.

Jones, William. *The Hour Has Struck*. New York: Doubleday, 1945. Repr., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1995.

h. A multivolume work

¹Clarence Boch, *A History of Europe* (3 vols.: New York: Oxford, 1964), 2:8.

¹Boch, *A History of Europe*, 2:8.

Boch, Clarence. *A History of Europe*. 3 vols. New York: Oxford, 1964.

i. A journal article

¹Richard J. Mouw, "Creational Politics: Some Calvinist Amendments," *Christian Scholar's Review* 23 (1993): 193.

¹Mouw, "Creational Politics," 193.

Mouw, Richard J. "Creational Politics: Some Calvinist Amendments." *Christian Scholar's Review* 23 (1993): 189-206.

j. A book review

¹H. Richard Niebuhr, review of Charles Clayton, *What Is Christianity?*, *Journal of Religion* 21 (1941): 190.

¹Niebuhr, review of Clayton, 190.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. Review of Charles Clayton, *What Is Christianity?* *Journal of Religion* 21 (April, 1941): 189-92.

k. An unpublished dissertation or thesis

¹Jerry Folk, "The Theological Development of Helmut Richard Niebuhr" (Ph.D. diss., Tübingen University, 1962), 16.

¹Folk, "The Theological Development," 16.

Folk, Jerry. "The Theological Development of Helmut Richard Niebuhr." Ph.D. diss., Tübingen University, 1962.

l. An article in an encyclopedia or dictionary

¹James Cuniform, "Topaz in the Book of Revelation," *IDB* 3:516.

¹Cuniform, "Topaz," 3:516.

Cuniform, James. "Topaz in the Book of Revelation," Page 516 in vol. 3 of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.

m. An article in a lexicon or theological dictionary

1) If discussing a word or family of words, give the entire title and page range of the article:

¹H. Beyer, "διακονεω, διακονια, κτλ," *TDNT* 2:81-93.

¹Beyer, *TDNT* 2:83.

2) If discussing a specific word in an article covering a larger group of words, name just the word examined and the pages on which it is examined:

¹H. Beyer, "διακονεω," *TDNT* 2:81-87.

¹Beyer, *TDNT*, 2:87.

3) The bibliography should cite only the theological dictionary:

Kittel, G. and G. Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976.

n. An internet publication with a print counterpart

¹G. Archer Weniger, "The Deadly Menace of the Cultural Mandate," *Faith for the Family* 2 (1974): 11-12. Cited 20 December 1999. Online: <http://www.bju.edu/faith/vol2num2/mandate.html>.

¹Weninger, "The Deadly Menace," 12.

Weniger, G. Archer. "The Deadly Menace of the Cultural Mandate," *Faith for the Family* 2 (1974): 11-12. Cited 20 December 1999. Online: <http://www.bju.edu/faith/vol2num2/mandate.html>.

o. An internet publication without a print counterpart

¹Wayne Lemon, "The Tent Is Large Enough for All," n.p. [cited 5 March 1998]. Online: <http://www.cvw.edu/lemon/tent.html>.

¹Lemon, "The Tent is Large Enough," n.p.

Lemon, Wayne. "The Tent Is Large Enough for All. No pages. Cited 5 March 1998. Online: <http://www.cvw.edu/lemon/tent.html>.

IV. SAMPLE PAGES

GRAND RAPIDS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MARTIN LUTHER'S NATURAL THEOLOGY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

BY

I. M. LIBERAL

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 2000

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CHAPTER TWO

CREATION AND FALL

Creation, fall, and redemption are inter-related in Niebuhr's thought. Unlike Christian orthodoxy, which views these three as consecutive events, Niebuhr does not make temporal distinctions between them.¹ He believes that God performs a single act toward the world, a world that has always been alienated from him. This singular action may be variously construed as creation, providence, judgment, or redemption, depending on the perspective of the observer.

The complex inter-relatedness of Niebuhr's thought defies a universally accepted entry point into his theology. Some scholars, such as Ahlstrom, Gustafson and Mawhinney believe that Niebuhr's theology is radically theocentric. This view tends to promote creation as the proper point of entry.² Others, such as Sherry, Kliever, Grima, Scriven, Frei, Hoedemaker, and Gardner, suggest that Niebuhr's theology is Christocentric. This position leans toward redemption as the appropriate place to begin.³

¹See *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 6-8 and *The Westminster Confession*, Ch. 4-8. These documents assert that a good creation was followed by a disastrous, historical transition into a sinful state, which will be succeeded temporally by the restoration of creation in Christ, culminating in the consummation when every facet of creation will be free from sin.

²Ahlstrom, "H. Richard Niebuhr's Place in American Thought," 215, Gustafson, "Introduction," 29, and Mawhinney, "H. Richard Niebuhr and Reshaping American Christianity," 142-43.

³Sherry, "Shaped By Christ: The Christo-Morphic Hermeneutical Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," vi-viii, Kliever, "Christology of H. Richard Niebuhr," *Journal of Religion* 50 (1970): 33, 48 and *H. Richard Niebuhr*, 138, Grima, "Christ and Conversion: H. Richard Niebuhr's Thought, 1933-37," 29, Scriven, "The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics After H. Richard Niebuhr," 282-83, Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," 66-67, 95-96, Hoedemaker, *The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, 64, and Edward Clinton Gardner, "Ethical Issues for the 1970's: A Critique of Christocentric Models of Ethical Analysis," *Religion in Life* 39 (1970): 206.

personal happiness for the good of the whole, knowing that God is concerned for being in general, yet he must also believe that God is on his side, that he has the individual's best interests at heart. How can Niebuhr have it both ways? He does so through his belief in the resurrection. Although the individual may sacrifice his own personal good for the good of the whole in this life, perhaps even to the point of death, yet God's resurrection power will reach him even there, supplying the individual with happiness in a new life. Niebuhr states:

For salvation now appears to us as deliverance from that deep distrust of the One in all the many that causes us to interpret everything that happens to us as issuing ultimately from animosity or as happening in the realm of destruction. Redemption appears as the liberty to interpret in trust all that happens as contained within an intention and a total activity that includes death within the domain of life, that destroys only to re-establish and renew.⁴

The resurrection guarantees the ultimate prosperity of the individual. In this way it also enables the whole of being to prosper, for the whole benefits as its individual components receive good.

Thus, belief in the resurrection becomes the cardinal object of the radical monotheist's trust. His faith culminates here, for the resurrection implies that God is both sovereign and good. Only a sovereign God is able to accomplish a resurrection and only a good God can be trusted to want to perform one. So those who hope in the resurrection from the dead have taken a huge, initial step down the road toward radical monotheism. Belief in the resurrection is an essential step in the process of redemption. Niebuhr explains: "Redemption means the substitution of the assurance of eternal life for the certainty of death--whether this be realized as the certainty of personal death, or the end of our religion or the decay of our civilization."⁵ Those who believe in the resurrection

⁴Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 142. Cf. idem, "Utilitarian Christianity," 5: "no evil can befall a good man'--or a good nation--'in life or in death.'"

⁵Niebuhr, "An Attempt at a Theological Analysis of Missionary Motivation," 5.

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