

SYDNEY COLLEGE OF DIVINITY

**ASSIGNMENT 1A: ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN NAMING AND REVEALING GOD**

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TRG400-Assignment 1A

**The Role of Scripture in Revealing and Naming the God of the Christian Tradition**

God, as such, is inexhaustible mystery – unfathomable; he is the One whose name is beyond all naming.<sup>1</sup> This short essay attempts to address the role of Scripture in revealing and naming the God of the Christian tradition.

The revealing and naming of God in Scripture can only be understood in relation to the Christian story – and not apart from it.<sup>2</sup> The reason is that the biblical narratives are accounts of God’s self-disclosure – his self-revelation and self-communication. Within the Christian story, then, the naming of God begins to take place. Naming can be understood as identifying and labelling attributes of God that are revealed in his word and works. It is the stories of the Old and New Testaments, then, that enabled the people to name God – the One, however, whose name is above all naming.<sup>3</sup>

The Old Testament text that has come down to today was handed down over many generations.<sup>4</sup> Eventually in the long history of God’s elect, Israel, Jesus was born among this people. Kelly writes that “through his preaching and mighty works, the self-revelation of God continued”.<sup>5</sup> The ministry of Jesus – God’s words and God’s works – reveal God as one who is faithful, just, and upright.<sup>6</sup> From reading the Gospel accounts, one discerns that the people were gradually becoming aware that in Jesus a new image of God was being revealed to them.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, “God was also revealed in the very person of Jesus”.<sup>8</sup> In other words, as God’s self-revelation continued, the people came to know God in a deeper way and from that they then named God.<sup>9</sup>

An example of the naming of God – that is, describing God’s self-revelation – can be seen through the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Downey writes,

“attending to the story of the father of two sons, we are awakened afresh to new insight. . . it is a word of unrestricted forgiveness and superabundant mercy – a prodigious love”<sup>10</sup> It is a story about love given freely – love that cannot be earned, but can only be given and received.<sup>11</sup> From God’s self-disclosure in the parable, God may be named and addressed as “Father.” However, Downey observes that “Father” is not God’s proper name – nor is “God” God’s name. In reality, God has no proper name. Rather, “Father” is a name that designates a relationship – God’s deep involvement with his people – as opposed to who God is in God’s fullness.<sup>12</sup> The name “Father” conveys commitment and compassion; it alludes to a loving protector who nourishes and sustains his people.<sup>13</sup> Downey writes “even when they fail to live up to the covenant offered to them and sealed by them, the people can still call upon God as the Father who remains steadfast and faithful to the pledge of enduring love”.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, the biblical text, handed down through many generations, contained God’s self-disclosure. As a result, the people came to know God from this text, and therefore came to name him based on his words and actions in history.

### **Bibliography**

Downey, Michael. *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000.

Kelly, Gerard. “Grounded in Faith”. In *An Introduction to Catholic Theology*, edited by Richard Lennan, 56-79. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Michael Downey, *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Kelly, “Grounded in Faith”, in *An Introduction to Catholic Theology*, ed. Richard Lennen (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Downey, *Altogether Gift*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*