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THE SELF-ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE PROPER  
GROUND FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Matthew Scott Wireman  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE SELF-ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE PROPER  
GROUND FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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To Ashley,

*Like a lily among thorns,*

*so is my Beloved among the maidens.*

Song of Songs 2:2

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Thesis .....	2
The Historical Context for the Doctrine .....	5
The Current Evangelical Milieu .....	15
Methodology .....	18
2. A SELECTIVE AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SCRIPTURE’S SELF-WITNESS .....	31
Patristic Period .....	32
Reformation .....	59
Post-Reformation and the Protestant Scholastics .....	74
Modern .....	82
Conclusion .....	95
3. A SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE POST-FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ AND JOHN R. FRANKE .....	97
Introduction .....	97

Denying Foundationalism and the Theological Method's Task .....	98
The Spirit's Scripture .....	116
Pannenbergian Coherentism and Eschatological Expectation .....	123
Situatedness .....	128
Communal Key .....	131
Conclusion .....	141
 4. THE OLD TESTAMENT PARADIGM OF YHWH'S WORD AND HIS PEOPLE .....	 144
<i>Sui Generis</i> : "God as Standard in His World" .....	145
God's Perfect and Comprehensive Knowledge Communicated to His Covenant People .....	156
The Spirit in the World .....	160
As YHWH Commanded and Men Wrote: The God-Scripture Relationship .....	164
God's Earthly Presence Through His Prophet .....	181
The Word of YHWH, Jeremiah, and Authority in the Old Testament .....	190
Canonical Considerations .....	205
Conclusion .....	212
 5. NEW TESTAMENT PROTOCOL FOR AUTHORITY AND INSCRIPTURATION .....	 215
Jesus as Revealer .....	218
Jesus' Authority .....	223
Jesus: The Prophet to Come and His Word .....	236

New Testament Witness to the Old Testament . . . . .	250
Canonical Consciousness of the New Testament . . . . .	253
Divine Foundation of the Apostolic Appointment . . . . .	255
Communicating the Divine Acts and Its Interpretation . . . . .	258
Apostolic Office . . . . .	268
Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος . . . . .	276
Conclusion . . . . .	281
6. SELF-ATTESTATION, SPEECH-ACT THEORY, AND THE ECONOMIC TRINITY . . . . .	283
God’s Aseity . . . . .	284
God’s Triune Communicative Action . . . . .	287
God’s Agents . . . . .	293
Scripture’s Authority . . . . .	295
Scripture’s Self-Witness as Theology’s Ground . . . . .	299
7. DEFINITION AND APPLICATION OF <i>AUTOPISTIA</i> . . . . .	308
Definition of Scripture’s Self-Attestation . . . . .	309
Application of the Doctrine to Tradition and Culture . . . . .	313
Post-Conservatives, Tradition, and Theological Method . . . . .	316
The Community and Its Canon . . . . .	329
Reorienting (Reformed) Epistemology . . . . .	335
Application of the Doctrine to Theological Method . . . . .	349
Application of the Doctrine to Apologetics . . . . .	360
Conclusion . . . . .	367

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 370

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , ed. J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1950.
<i>ANF1</i>	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . 1st Series. Translated and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics 1.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God</i> , G. W. Bromiley, trans., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010)
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
<i>NPNF2</i>	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . 2nd Series. Translated and ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012.
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

- Pesik. Rab Kah.* Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. *Pesikta De-Rab Kahana: R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days.* Translated by William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein. Philadelphia: Jewish, 2002.
- PG* Jacques-Paul Migne, *Index alphabeticus omnium doctorum, patrum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum quorum opera scriptaque vel minima in Patrologia Latina reperiuntur.* Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1965.
- PRRD* Richard Mueller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics.* 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- RE* Reformed Epistemology
- SJT* *Scottish Journal of Theology*
- JES* *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
- VC* *Vigilae Christianae*
- WCF* *Westminster Confession of Faith*
- WorksStAug1* *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century.* Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2002.
- WTJ* *Westminster Journal of Theology*

## PREFACE

The first place to attack the Christian faith is at the foundation of Scripture—both for the skeptic and for the believer. God has chosen to reveal himself to us by way of a Book, a Book that is also a sword. I have had countless discussions with people who struggle with the Christian faith in our present milieu due to a lack of confidence in Scripture’s testimony. When I have doubt, it more often than not resides in my doubting God’s promises as revealed in Scripture. If I cannot trust God’s words to me, then I am left hopeless and lost. I have no interpretation for the world around me. I have no direction and basis for morality.

My love for Scripture began from childhood when we sang, “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so.” The ground for my knowing that Jesus loved me was the Bible telling me so. God has graciously told us that he is merciful and slow to anger. We would not know this, even though the heavens declare the glory of God. We would know his immensity, but not his intimacy, save for him graciously revealing himself. In light of this, I can think of no other doctrine to which I could dedicate myself for the work of being called a doctor. God has been abundantly kind to cause me to persevere and produce this dissertation.

It is a privilege to be able to submit this dissertation to the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am forever indebted to the investment made in my life both in theological training and practice. As the old adage goes, I have never had an original thought in my life; I hope to merely repeat the refrain of the Gospel that has

been parsed out from my teachers until I die. I hope to rehearse the beauty of that Gospel from the men I have learned it from at the seminary.

This work would not have been possible without the labors of others who served the church and me by offering their time and talent in this work. Any discrepancies in this work, however, are wholly mine. Micah McCormick read rough drafts of each of the chapters and offered invaluable insight and critique for how to organize and strengthen this work. Toby Jennings was a constant encouragement and helped in thinking through style guide issues. Sarah Lewis tirelessly worked on each chapter to make sure that it cohered with Southern's Style Manual—work worthy of a doctorate itself! Marsha Omanson tirelessly worked on several drafts of this dissertation, ensuring with her ever-capable eye, to make sure it followed the proper formatting required by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

CrossPoint Church in Clemson, SC graciously blessed me with a financial gift for a semester so that I would feel less strain while studying full time and working full time. I pray that your labors as a church continue to train an ever-new generation of mature disciples.

Sovereign Grace Ministries has been overflowing in encouragement and assistance toward my family and me so that this dissertation might be finished. I pray that God continues to bless this ministry, of which I am now a part.

John Franke took the time both to read a very rough draft of my chapter treating his and Stanley Grenz' post-foundationalism and to talked with me on the phone regarding his views of Scripture, culture, and tradition. Dr. Franke, I admire your charity and willingness to help someone that not only disagrees with you but critiques your view.

That, truly, is an example of Christian love.

Nicholas Wolterstorff graciously read the final three chapters of this dissertation to ensure that I understood his position well—a position from which I hoped to build. For no benefit of his own, but for the sheer dedication to scholarship in the church, he offered helpful insight into Reformed Epistemology.

I count it the highest honor to have been able to know and learn from Stephen Wellum, as well as grow in my personal Christian discipleship by observing him. I have told many people that Steve's hermeneutics class changed my life; and it became the impetus for this dissertation. I have also told many people that I pursued my doctorate at Southern because of Steve. I remember walking with him to his car one day talking about academia and pastoral ministry. He turned to me and said, "I don't need the world to know my name. I just want to be a faithful husband and father." I can attest that he is both, in addition to being a first-rate theologian. By God's grace many people may not know your name, Steve, but your influence will extend to innumerable people as pastors and theologians have learned from you and will teach their families and congregations what you have imparted to them. Thank you for showing me what it means to forebear and serve in the midst of adversity. Thank you for showing me what it means to be faithful.

Michael A. G. Haykin made me love the early church more and appreciate the sacrifice of our brothers and sisters through the centuries. Michael's love for the church is evidenced in why he studies the early church. He does not merely study the early church so as to fill a niche in the academy; his heart's desire is to build up the church. From his writing projects to his speaking engagements, it is clear that Michael loves Jesus and he

loves Jesus' people. I pray that many more contemporaries will grow in their love for the world (geographically and chronologically) as a result of your devotion. Thank you for being a friend and inspiration.

I have learned from Chad Owen Brand how to have fun while talking theology. In fact, delight in God's good gifts goes hand in hand with delighting in God. An unabashed audiophile, Chad's ability to appreciate God's world has helped me see the beauty of it. As with Steve and Michael, Chad's love for the local church is evident in his tireless devotion to pastoring. Sitting in several classes, Chad would request prayer for people he was going to share the Gospel with the following day as well as grieve over a health or relational issue someone had in his congregation. May many professors love with the candor and devotion with which you love, Chad.

Of course, this dissertation would not be possible without the sacrifice and devotion and love of the dearest person to me on earth, my wife. Ashley, you have modeled Christ-like joy and commitment in the face of challenging years. You have followed this sinner to so many different places so that I could be trained in order to serve God's people better because you love your Savior. This has truly been a sacrifice of praise to Jesus. You did not complain or despise. You counted it a joy to wait on your dreams and aspirations for the sake of Christ. I cannot imagine my life without you and would never be able to do what I have done without your support and encouragement. When I wanted to give up on this dissertation, you would not let me—quite literally! You truly are my best friend. I confide my soul to yours and pray that many will be able to know you and learn from you as I have. For by knowing you, Christ is made palpable. By knowing you, grace, mercy, peace, and joy are made real. Our children rise up and call

you blessed. I am respected in the gates because of your diligence. Your Savior is made much of because you serve in the strength that he supplies. You are a treasure to behold.

Matthew S. Wireman

Charlotte, North Carolina

December 2012

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

No other book has received so much attention and been the center of so much controversy than the Bible. Fueled by the desire to have the Bible be the church's supreme authority, and seeing the Bible's authority standing over councils and the church, the Reformers sought to explicate and defend Scripture's self-attestation to its authority. Without self-attestation, the Reformers believed that men would have to be the arbiters of what was God's Word—and not God himself.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the Roman Catholic Church's highest court of appeal, as to whether a book is God's word, was a council or a community bestowing authority on that text, rather than the text having an inherent authority.

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7 ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). This dissertation will not be able to treat the history of reception and recognition of the canon at length. For further on this topic see James H. Charlesworth, "Writings Ostensibly outside the Canon," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 57-85; Stephen G. Dempster, "Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 87-127; Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible: An Historical and Exegetical Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957); idem, "Some Thoughts on the Beginning of the New Testament Canon," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 85-108; Brooke Foss Westcott, "On the Primitive Doctrine of Inspiration," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 2-45; James White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2004), 95-119.

While the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is the hinge upon which the divide between Protestants and Roman Catholics hangs, it is the doctrine of Scripture's self-attestation that is the pin that holds that hinge. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* exists because no other authority exists outside of God's own self-revelation, the Bible. As John H. Armstrong has said, "Scripture has no equal authority precisely because Scripture alone has its source in God, who, by the Holy Spirit, is its Author."<sup>2</sup> If Scripture is not the first and the last word in theology, then men are left to determine for themselves, in a swirl of culture and tradition and subjective experience, what is true and what God hath said.

### **Thesis**

This dissertation argues that the objective, self-attesting authority of Scripture is the only proper ground in Christian systematic theology and its defense in the world. To deny it is to deny systematic theology as an objective discipline without proper epistemological grounding. If it is denied or dismissed, Christians are left with experience or a community dictating what is truly God's word and what is human imagination.

Orthodox Christianity has understood self-attestation in variegated ways throughout its history. Yet, many misconceptions have stemmed from a truncated view of Scripture's self-witness—a failure to understand the objective and subjective aspects of Scripture as well as the Word-Spirit relationship. Properly understood, self-attestation helps illuminate the proper relationship between perennial issues of canon, hermeneutics,

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<sup>2</sup>John H. Armstrong, "The Authority of Scripture," in *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 121. In this way, there is no one higher than God Himself to which he can appeal (Heb 6:13-16).

apologetics, *sola Scriptura*, inspiration, perspicuity, sufficiency, inerrancy, and infallibility. If this doctrine is rightly understood then the divide between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism can be clarified. Further, within amorphous evangelicalism, boundaries of orthodoxy can be drawn and defended better. Of particular note are recent developments from post-conservative theologians (i.e., Stanley J. Grenz, John R. Franke) who have been unable to articulate this doctrine (even denying it)<sup>3</sup> and are consigned to a foundation of tradition—and not Scripture—to build their respective theologies. In light of this, Grenz and Franke will be the main conversation partners for this work with regards to contemporary, evangelical theology.

As noted above, the Reformers reaffirmed the doctrine of Scripture's self-witness as a way of explaining where the Roman Church went awry in her view of authority. Rome would have said that Scripture is God's Word, but its conception of Scripture's role in theology was different than what the early church held. It had placed the interpretive community over Scripture. That is, it taught that the church *determined* what writings should be considered Scripture. In this way, the objective element of Scripture is subsumed under the subjective authority of the church. With Calvin at the fore Scripture's self-attestation was explicated and given contours as to how it witnesses to itself and how the church came to recognize particular books.

Since Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, volume 1 book 7, there was not a devoted explication of what self-attestation meant until Herman Bavinck and Cornelius Van Til tackled the doctrine in their *Prolegomena* and *A Christian Theory of*

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 114-15.

*Knowledge*,<sup>4</sup> respectively. Save for Bernard Ramm's *Pattern of Authority* and *The Witness of the Spirit*, there has not been a book-length attempt to explain how Scripture witnesses to its own authority. Louis Gaussen,<sup>5</sup> Herman Ridderbos,<sup>6</sup> John Murray,<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem,<sup>8</sup> John Frame,<sup>9</sup> and Greg Bahnsen<sup>10</sup> have each been helpful in showing the doctrine's importance, but a full, book-length explanation is not offered.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what is needed now is a bold assertion and defense of the doctrine from which Protestantism received its grounding. It is not as though this doctrine was contrived because of controversy. Rather, similar to Christological and canonical debates in the church, much of the doctrine was assumed—the need for *clarity* came because of the denials.

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<sup>4</sup>Van Til also treated the topic in his introduction to *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, by B. B. Warfield (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980); Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Louis Guassen, *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (Chicago: Moody, 1949).

<sup>6</sup>Herman Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, ed. J. M. Kik, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969).

<sup>7</sup>John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 1-54.

<sup>8</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 19-59.

<sup>9</sup>John Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 178-200; idem, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994); idem, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 207-31; idem, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987).

<sup>10</sup>Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998).

## The Historical Context for the Doctrine

As early as Athanasius' 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter, the church has assumed the Scriptures were God's word because they claimed to be just that.<sup>12</sup> He offered a list of canonical books: "Since some have taken in hand to set in order for themselves the so-called apocrypha and to mingle them with the God-inspired scripture, concerning which we have attained to a sure persuasion, according to what the original eye-witness and ministers of the word have delivered unto our fathers."<sup>13</sup> This is the earliest document revealing this assumption. The very nature of the OT and NT assumes an expectation that God's people would heed his written word by virtue of God being its author.

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<sup>11</sup>To be fair, each of these men sought to explain the doctrine of Scripture. Scripture's self-witness resides in this broader doctrine. Yet, if this doctrine is the foundation from which Scripture's authority is grounded, it behooves us to explicate it more fully.

<sup>12</sup>See Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* in vol. 4 of *NPNF2*, 26. In his apology against the heathen Athanasius begins with the order of creation, but it is in sections 41-47 that he makes clear the natural theology he understands is only comprehensible from Scripture first—given the presupposition of the Word being the Creator of the Universe. By virtue of this special revelation (first), Athanasius is able to assume unity and purpose in the natural world. Put another way, Athanasius begins with Scripture—assuming it is God's word—in order to ground his apologetics in the natural world. He does not look to the natural world first to place some kind of authority or veracity for Scripture. This will be dealt at length in the Patristic section and concluding reflections of the dissertation. He says, "He that reasons in such a way [viz. from nature first] is mad, and beyond all madness, even so affected in mind, I think, are those who do not recognize God or worship His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour of all, through Whom the Father orders, and holds together all things, and exercises providence over the Universe . . . if only the soul be adorned according to His laws." *Ibid.*, 29-30. Note also how Basil argues in *On the Spirit*, in *NPNF2* 8:5. Gregory of Nyssa follows the same line of argument in *The Great Catechism* where he argues from logic, but only after his opponents have presupposed the authority of Scripture. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, *NPNF2* 5:471-509. Also Gregory Nazianzen who begins his first theological oration, "I am to speak against persons who pride themselves on their eloquence; so, to begin with a text of Scripture, 'Behold, I am against thee, O thou proud one,' not only in thy system of teaching, but also in thy hearing, and in thy tone of mind." He then chastises the Eunomians for their philosophizing rather than submitting to God's written word. Gregory Nazianzen, *The First Theological Orations: A Preliminary Discourse against the Eunomians*, *NPNF2* 7:285. And finally, Ambrose (Augustine's spiritual father) assumes that God spoke in the OT and NT by his Spirit; see *Of the Holy Spirit*, in *NPNF2* 10: 1.4.

<sup>13</sup>Athanasius, 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter, *NPNF2* 4:551-52. Note: Athanasius appeals to two elements: (1) Subjective: The recognized inspiration inherent in Scripture by God's people; (2) Objective: The writers of the texts who were "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." This is particularly important to the thesis of the dissertation as it will be shown both Roman Catholics and post-conservative evangelicals err on the element of subjectivity—the community of faith—as the final authority, and not Scripture.

This assumption—that the Scriptures implicitly had authority because of their divine authorship—continued until schism of the medieval period. Seeking to buttress the authority of the Pope and councils, the Roman Church taught that Scripture was Scripture because the church imbued it with authority.<sup>14</sup> John Eck and John Cochlaeus argued that the church was older than Scripture; therefore “Scripture would not be authentic without the Church’s authority.”<sup>15</sup> Eck goes on to quote Augustine’s *Answer to the Letter of Mani Known as The Foundation* 5.6 where he says, “I would not believe the gospel if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me.”<sup>16</sup> What is perplexing is that both Eck

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<sup>14</sup>This dramatic shift can first be seen in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* where the authority of the church is asserted particularly in the forgiveness of sins and the conference of grace through the sacraments, penance, and the keys of heaven; see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 3 (QQ. 94-SUPPL. 33), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1928). Aquinas’ emphasis on the authority of the church made divine revelation dependent upon the vessel of the church. He says, “It was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation, because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.” *Ibid.*, pt. 1 (QQQ. 1-26) (1920), 2. A few observations are in order to understand how the Thomist shift affected subsequent talk about Scripture. First, natural revelation is sufficient to save, albeit only a few enlightened ones. Second, therefore, nature swallows up grace (to borrow Francis Shaeffer’s analogy; see Ken Myers, “Christianity, Culture, and Common Grace,” in *Mars Hill Monographs* [on-line]; accessed 6 April 2010; available from <http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/pdf/ComGrace.pdf>; Internet. Third, he begins with the presupposition that the church possesses the Word of God so as to confer grace to people.

<sup>15</sup>John Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces: Against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 13.

<sup>16</sup>Augustine, *Answer to the Letter of Mani Known as “The Foundation,”* bk. 5.6 in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, vol. 19, *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2006), 236.

and Calvin cite Augustine to prove their point for the ultimate authority of the church or Scripture, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

Two worldviews collided. What is the nature of Scripture? Is it merely the texts to which the church and her councils have chosen to submit themselves? Or did God's written word shape the church? To answer Eck's claim (that Augustine taught that the church imbued Scripture with authority), Calvin sought to place Augustine's answer to the Manicheans in its broader context and with his other writings.<sup>18</sup> Augustine wrote,

Now what can God's testimonies be, if not those things by which he bears witness to himself? A testimony is the means by which something is proved. Thus God's ways of justice and God's commandments are attested by God. If God wants to persuade us of anything, he persuades us by his own testimonies. . . . By his testimonies God gives us good reason to worship him disinterestedly, but the obstacle to worshipping gratis is covetousness, the root of all evils.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine's emphasis on Scripture being the final authority is clear not only from his theology of Scripture, but also in his application of Scripture to apologetics. Augustine begins with Scripture to show the futility of thought that does not begin with what God has said. He says,

It requires no knowledge of Cicero's dialogues and of a collection of contradictory maxims begged from others in order to gain hearers. Let those who are going to receive from you such a teaching become attentive because of your moral conduct. *I do not want you first to teach something that must be unlearned in order that you may teach the truth.* For if the knowledge of other dissident and contrary views in some way helps the teacher of the Christian truth to know how to destroy opposing

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<sup>17</sup>Because of this thorny issue of interpreting Augustine on the relationship between the authority of the church and Scripture, an at length discussion will be given. See the Table of Contents below.

<sup>18</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.3. Calvin further encourages Eck to read Augustine's *The Usefulness of Belief*. Ibid., 1.2.3.

<sup>19</sup>Augustine, *Exposition 11 of Psalm 118.6* in *Expositions of the Psalms 99-120*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2003), 391; "disinterestedly" meaning "without selfish pretense" and "gratis" meaning "freely." See also Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's "De Trinitate"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106-24.

errors, it helps at least so that anyone arguing in opposition does not set his eye only on refuting your views while he carefully hides his own.<sup>20</sup>

Over time, the church began opting for *prolegomena*, justification based upon indubitable facts independent or not grounded in the text of Scripture, to begin theology, rather than Scripture itself.<sup>21</sup> Systematic theology was treated as a discipline that could be started with reason outside of Scripture, bringing in Scripture later to show that the Christian faith did not contradict reason. In an effort to revive and explicate the doctrine of self-attestation against those who placed Scripture under the authority of the church, John Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by showing that Scripture itself, without external verification, is the Christian's grounding authority. Because of Rome's emphasis on ecclesiastical authority, Calvin explained that no one and nothing could determine what is God's word—any more than Calvin's words can be determined to be Calvin's words by anyone other than him; they simply are his words. It is by virtue of Scripture's own claim to be God's word that it is to be the highest authority.<sup>22</sup> He wrote,

But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church. As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men! *For they mock the Holy Spirit when they ask: Who can convince us that these writings came from God? Who can*

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<sup>20</sup>Augustine *Letter 118.11-12* in *WorksStAug*; emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup>For example, Peter Lombard of the twelfth century began his *Sentences* by starting with Augustine's teaching in *De Doctrina Christiana* regarding signs and things signified. Lombard begins with what the church doctors had said and builds his theology of the Trinity from them. Lombard becomes the standard for Roman theology at this point; see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994), 33-302. Aquinas seems to readjust the methodology of Lombard by beginning with an apology in his *Summa Theologica* that theology is just as important to life as philosophy is. Yet, the church still becomes the arbiter for what is to be believed as opposed to Scripture standing over the church; see Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Creation*, trans. Steven E. Baldner and William E. Carroll (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), 63-132.

<sup>22</sup>See also William P. Alston, "On Knowing That We Know: The Application to Religious Knowledge," in *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 15-39.

assure us that Scripture has come down whole and intact even to our very day? *Who can persuade us to receive one book in reverence but to exclude another, unless the church prescribe a sure rule for all these matters? What reverence is due Scripture and what books ought to be reckoned within its canon depend, they say, upon the determination of the church.* Thus these sacrilegious men, wishing to impose an unbridled tyranny under the cover of the church, do not care with what absurdities they ensnare themselves and others, provided they can force this one idea upon the simple-minded: that the church has authority in all things.<sup>23</sup>

Calvin challenges the notion that there must be an authority outside of Scripture itself (in this case, the authority of the Roman Catholic Church), because it necessarily subverts the authority of God's own words. Persuasion did not come from a council, but God's people heard his voice in the Scriptures and recognized it as their canon—as opposed to a council conferring authority upon the texts. Just as it is self-evident to the senses that white is white and black is black, so also the Scriptures show themselves to be God's word written. It was not a council that decided what the Christian canon would be. It was the fact that God spoke, and his people heard his voice<sup>24</sup>—as differentiated from other voices—that the Christian Scriptures were delineated from Gnostic and Apocryphal writings.

Due to misunderstandings of faith's authority, Scripture had to be reasserted as the basis of authority for life and doctrine—in contradistinction from tradition and new revelations of the Spirit. This revived doctrine brought clarity to the Protestant faith in the Westminster Confession and subsequent documents from Reformers.<sup>25</sup> If self-attestation is lost, then the authority of God's word over the church is subverted so that

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<sup>23</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.1; emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup>John 10:27; cf. Ath., 39<sup>th</sup> *Festal Letter*, in *NPNF* vol. 4.

<sup>25</sup>See *Westminster Confession*, 1.4-10; *Belgic Confession*, Article 5; *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, Articles 20 and 34; *The Irish Articles of Religion*, Sec. 1; *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Chap. 1.

the church dictates what is and is not God’s word. As Kline reiterates, “Inasmuch, then, as canonical Scripture is God’s house-building word, the community rule for his covenant people, the Reformation insistence is confirmed that the Scriptures form the church, and not vice versa.”<sup>26</sup>

Aquinas, and those who followed his methodology, believed the most effective method in verifying Scripture’s authority for their culture was by working from natural revelation—showing the existence of God—and then moving to special revelation as the creed to which a God-fearer must subscribe.<sup>27</sup> In other words, reason and logic govern Scripture and its authority. Scripture, however, assumes authority because of its author, and this was the assumption of God’s people since the primitive church’s conception. Further, since there is no one whose authority is higher than God (Heb 6:13; cf. 1 Cor 2:10-16), he is the only one who can bear witness to his words.

The justification for biblical authority cannot be laid at the feet of natural theology or the church—as though they confer authority upon the Scriptures. Rather, Scripture’s self-witness provides justification for being able to do theology at all. To speak about God, is to speak about the Triune God—who is only revealed in the text of Scripture.

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<sup>26</sup>Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 89.

<sup>27</sup>In volume 1 of his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas begins with Questions 2-11 which pose whether God even exists. He answers Question 2 thus: “Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition [God exists] is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are made known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects.” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 21. He then moves to show that “we have a more perfect knowledge by grace [viz. special revelation] than by natural reason.” Ibid., 147. In other words, the necessity of Scripture is by consequence and not a priori. It is more fit and sure to have been given Scripture, but the truth of it must first be verified by reason. This dissertation will seek to adjust this order so that God’s self-revelation comes first and natural revelation follows.

Most systematic theologians, like B. B. Warfield,<sup>28</sup> do not treat the issue of Scripture's own testimony. They begin their *prolegomena* in natural revelation to justify what they will say subsequently from special revelation. This assumes that there are axioms (namely, logic) more certain and ultimate than God's revelation. Such methodology has not gone deep enough into the ground for logic and reason. It has forgotten that reason serves a "ministerial function" and not a magisterial order.<sup>29</sup> That is, logic and reason presume the Christian worldview.<sup>30</sup> In an effort to find common ground with the *imago Dei* that does not believe in Christ, theologians have lost the very epistemological ground all men stand on by not explicating the reason men can know or assert anything. Theology must begin with Scripture rather than *apologia* (using Scripture to explain natural revelation and not natural revelation to explain special revelation).

Why does the Christian believe the Bible? Because it is God's word. Why do they believe it is God's word? Because it says it is God's word. Detractors often charge such answers as fideistic. The reason this is not fideism is because the Christian takes Scripture on its own terms. It is the ground of knowledge and argumentation. Theologians do not merely say "We believe the Bible because it says we should believe it." Rather, the theologian points to the God of the Bible who has revealed himself and his purposes for mankind. He points to nature and then points to the Bible as the

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<sup>28</sup>B. B. Warfield, "The Task and Method of Systematic Theology," in *Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 91-114. Here he describes systematic theology as the "culminating department of theological science," which begins with apologetical theology. *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>29</sup>K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 87.

<sup>30</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 8-11.

interpretation of the God who is readily evident in nature.<sup>31</sup> If people only begin with one book of revelation (namely, nature), people will never know what they are supposed to do. As Romans 1 teaches, men know that God exists from what is seen in nature, but he denies it because he insists on interpreting the world from his own perspective. Nature needs God's interpretation. Scripture claims to be God's covenant document for his creatures—giving definition and purpose to the world.<sup>32</sup>

But it is not as though because Scripture is self-attesting—that is, shows itself to be God's word without proofs—that all people see it as God's word. In a similar way that Romans 1 makes clear regarding natural revelation, so men also suppress what they know to be true.<sup>33</sup> External proofs are not necessary to *prove* Scripture is God's word—it is God's Word by its own testimony and assumption.<sup>34</sup> As Protestant Scholasticism developed the application of Scripture's self-attestation, proofs became *confirmatory* to its authorship, but never determinative.<sup>35</sup> In apologetics, natural theology and proofs are helpful as evidence in responding to what Alvin Plantinga calls defeaters to belief—

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<sup>31</sup>Jeffrey K. Jue, "Theologia Naturalis: A Reformed Tradition," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 168-89. For an example of this method, see Lane G. Tipton, "Paul's Christological Interpretation of Creation and Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 95-114.

<sup>32</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 115-50.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 198.

<sup>34</sup>In the section on the OT and NT, I will deal at length with the assumption that the prophets and apostles spoke for God—the numerous occurrences of "Thus says YHWH" (with particular attention to the incarnational aspect of the prophetic office highlighted in Jeremiah) and the apostolic recording of history.

<sup>35</sup>Richard A. Muller, *PRRD* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:29, 39, 42-46, 49-52, 85-146; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:561-600.

questions or doubts someone has inhibiting him from trusting the Scriptures for what they are.<sup>36</sup> Put another way, RE has argued persuasively that belief in God is basic to human knowledge. This basic knowledge is seen in Genesis 1-2, Psalm 19, and Romans 1, where Scripture teaches that humans are made in the image of God and all of Creation cries out to the glory and magnificence of God. There is no need to give external evidences (i.e., basic beliefs as conceived in Classic Foundationalism) to prove God's existence. Belief in God is part of the human constitution.<sup>37</sup>

The Christian is in his epistemic rights to believe the Bible is God's Word and place his faith in it as such.<sup>38</sup> As long as his faculties are functioning properly, the Christian's simple answers are enough to be warranted.<sup>39</sup> Apologetics, however, is helpful in showing that his answers are also justified.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 357-499. He writes, "Acquiring a defeater for a belief puts you in a position in which you can't rationally continue to hold the belief. Defeaters of this kind are *rationality* defeaters; given belief in the defeating proposition, you can retain belief in the defeated proposition only at the cost of irrationality." *Ibid.*, 359; italics original. Rationality contains both internal and external aspects (*ibid.*, 365).

<sup>37</sup>Compare Mark E. Powell, "Canonical Theism and the Challenge of Epistemic Certainty: Papal Infallibility as a Case Study," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie C. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 195-209; Douglas M. Koskela, "The Authority of Scripture in Its Ecclesial Context," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie C. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 210-23.

<sup>38</sup>Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 167-98, 241-89. Plantinga defines two levels to belief: warranted and justified. He defines warranted belief in the following way: "To count as knowledge, a belief, obviously enough, must have more going for it than truth. That extra something is what I call 'warrant.' . . . A belief has warrant just if it is produced by cognitive processes or faculties that are functioning properly, in a cognitive environment that is propitious for that exercise of cognitive powers, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief" (*ibid.*, xi).

<sup>39</sup>This is not to place an outside criterion as to whether Scripture is authoritative but it serves as a response to those who would charge Christian's with vicious circular reasoning—a topic to be discussed in chapter 7. "Functioning properly" is a term Plantinga uses to explain that if someone is not unduly affected (i.e., drugs, hallucinations, coercion, mental instability), he is considered normal and should be believed. He writes, "A belief has warrant just if it is produced by cognitive processes or faculties that are functioning properly, in a cognitive environment that is propitious for that exercise of cognitive powers,

The doctrine of self-attestation, moreover, takes the canon on its own terms.<sup>41</sup> It says that the canon is God’s word written by his spokesmen; therefore, men must listen. Instead of the canon coming under external criteria, it first judges the intentions of men’s hearts. Speaking of this divine initiative, Vanhoozer says, “The macrogenre of Scripture is divine address: Scripture is the means by which the covenant Lord addresses his church [and world] in various ways. . . . The appropriate global response to the Scriptures as divine address is to *pray*.”<sup>42</sup>

By way of explanation, the doctrine of self-attestation has two aspects—objective and subjective.<sup>43</sup> The objective aspect pertains to the authorized speaker of the divine words. Moses, the prophets, and apostles were endowed with authority by virtue of their relationship to God—he called them and sent them out to proclaim his words. The subjective aspect, also called “illumination,” pertains to the believer’s *assurance* that God is speaking in the text. The Holy Spirit, who resides within the believer, recognizes the

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according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief” (Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, xi).

<sup>40</sup>The term “justified” stems from classic foundationalism’s attempt to prove whether knowledge is true or not. When Plantinga argued that belief in God is basic to human knowledge, he argues that belief in God is *justified* knowledge; see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 167-98.

<sup>41</sup>By extension, the issue of canon is pertinent to the discussion—i.e., which books are recognized as being authoritative (such as, God’s words)? How does the issue of conference of authority and recognition of authority relate to what the church submits herself to? It is important to understand that whence Scripture derives its authority resides the criteria by which the canon is recognized. In an effort to focus and explicate Scripture’s self-witness (biblically and historically), this dissertation will not treat canonical issues directly. Yet, how one knows what the canon is will be made clearer as a result of knowing how one identifies what is God’s written word.

<sup>42</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 224; emphasis original.

<sup>43</sup>So Murray, “The Attestation of Scripture,” 1-54. The objective element answers the question, “Why just these books?” The subjective element is the illumination of the text in the believer’s heart giving him certainty that these books are God’s words. See Calvin, *Institutes* 1, ch. 7.

words of God. There need be no argument to prove that white is white, so it is with God's Word being God's Word.

### **The Current Evangelical Milieu**

Theologians today are dismissing the doctrine of self-attestation and opting for the community of faith as the integrating motif of the Christian faith.<sup>44</sup> Stanley Grenz and John Franke believe the ground for theology is God. While this is true at the most basic level, the question remains: How has this God communicated himself to his world? In *Beyond Foundationalism*, Grenz and Franke place their faith in the community of faith, insofar that the Spirit speaks to the community through Scripture. The community, then, becomes the interpreter and appropriator of God's words. "Christian theology is an activity of the community that gathers around Jesus the Christ."<sup>45</sup> Again,

We must never conclude that exegesis alone can exhaust the Spirit's speaking to us through the text. Although the Spirit's illocutionary act is to appropriate the text in its internal meaning (i.e., to appropriate what the author said), the Spirit appropriates the text with the goal of communicating to us in *our* situation, which, while perhaps paralleling in certain respects that of the ancient community, is nevertheless unique. . . . We read the text cognizant that we are the contemporary embodiment of a centuries-long interpretive tradition within the Christian community (and hence we must pay attention to our culture).<sup>46</sup>

What takes prominence, then, is the community of faith. In fact, Grenz interprets the Reformed epistemologists to say the community is "basic" in theology. "The focus on the communal nature of theology opens the way for introducing *community* as theology's

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<sup>44</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 263; cf. 43, 135, 174.

<sup>45</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 201.

<sup>46</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 75.

integrative motif.<sup>47</sup> This hearkens back to how John Eck spoke about the councils determining what the church would submit to her canon and what she would leave out. Since Scripture was not entirely perspicuous, and man is unable to know where exactly God is speaking through the text, the Christian needed an outside judge to teach him what was God's Word.

Several issues of difficulty surface in the grounding and doing of theology. First, there needs to be an objective and obtainable standard outside of the subjective experience of the believer. To be objective and obtainable does not imply exhaustive, as Grenz and Franke concluded above. Finite humans are able to know, though only in part. To know in part, does not mean that such knowledge is faulty, impure, or untrue, as Grenz and Franke surmise.<sup>48</sup> Fifty cents is not a complete dollar, yet it is no less a true value. Second, the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture is uncertain in post-conservative methodology. While illumination is affirmed, inspiration is compromised because the Holy Spirit merely uses the text that already exists.<sup>49</sup> Third, by not grounding the Spirit's work in the objective Word of God, myriad of issues arise, not least of these what is termed a trajectory hermeneutic,<sup>50</sup> or redemptive-movement hermeneutic,<sup>51</sup> that

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 214. Cf. *ibid.*, 209.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 65, 80, 209.

<sup>49</sup>John R. Franke, "The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 202; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 84.

<sup>50</sup>William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

<sup>51</sup>William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011).

allows culture to *determine* the trajectory and meaning of the Scripture.<sup>52</sup> Fourth, uncertainty as to the composition of the Christian canon surfaces.<sup>53</sup> Fifth, apologetics becomes difficult when adjudicating between competing truth claims.<sup>54</sup> Sixth, historic Protestant theology has taught that tradition and culture (application to contemporary life) are vital in hermeneutics, yet has given preeminence to Scripture. From Calvin to the present day, the inherent authority of Scripture is the adjudicating factor for both culture and tradition. They do not share equal voices in the theological task. It is the contention of this dissertation, and given the cultural proclivity toward communal, reader-response theory, that a fresh reclamation of Scripture's self-attestation is needed.

Self-attestation begins at a different place than both the *prolegomena* of systematic theologies of late and the community of faith in Roman Catholicism and post-conservative evangelicals. Instead of grounding Scripture's authority in its reliability or manuscriptural evidence or historical longevity, Scripture is taken for what it is; *then* defeaters are answered for those that doubt its authority. Scripture is read on its own terms. Apologetically speaking, such a view of Scripture's self-witness presupposes that the Bible gives the very foundation unbelievers must assume in order for logic and reason

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<sup>52</sup>See Alistair McGrath, "Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 139-58.

<sup>53</sup>Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., "Why the Inclusive Language Lectionary," *Christian Century* 101 (1984): 742-44.

<sup>54</sup>Carson, "Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?" in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191-92.

to make sense. Scripture is the transcendental ground for theology.<sup>55</sup> Thus the Christian must present Scripture in its entirety as the Word of God—an entire worldview. Only after this is done does the Christian answer the questions presented to him.

## Methodology

The thesis is demonstrated through historical development, biblical exposition, and theological construction. Chapter 2 looks at the doctrine as it has been historically developed. Assumed by the early church, self-attestation was not explicated until the Reformation due to confusion about Scripture's relationship to the church's authority.<sup>56</sup> Michael Horton has said that the Protestant scholastics spent time on *prolegomena* seeking “to make explicit the presuppositions derived from the intrasystematic unity of theology.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, what had been assumed needed to be made explicit due to swirling doubts of how one even begins to speak about the Christian God. The Protestant scholastics were markedly different from the Thomist school that sought to ground the

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<sup>55</sup>Don Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 258-78; also Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 5. The conclusion of the dissertation will offer a transcendental argument for the Christian scriptures.

<sup>56</sup>This explication is not just the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. It is present as early as John Wycliffe, who sought to herald Scripture's preeminence. See Gotthard Lechler VI, *John Wiclif and his English Precursors* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1881), 262-73. Lechler writes, “[Wycliffe] recognises the Scriptures as, in and by themselves, the all-sufficing source of Christian knowledge. . . . With a clear consciousness of the whole bearing and extent of this truth, Wiclif lays down the fundamental proposition—God's law, i.e., holy Scripture, is the unconditional and absolutely binding authority.” *Ibid.*, 265. This fundamental principle is true also of Jan Hus—see Isaak A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 1:68.

<sup>57</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 2.

theological endeavor using natural theology; namely, Scripture’s veracity needed to be defended before it could be read with confidence.<sup>58</sup>

The Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine believed that Scripture stood on its own authority.<sup>59</sup> Although Aquinas believed supernatural and natural revelation were complementary, he, and those who followed in his wake, sought to build apologetic bridges with the culture by way of natural revelation.<sup>60</sup> He believed that knowledge of God could be grasped independently from Scripture.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, volumes of systematic theologies sought to justify the theological task by appealing to natural revelation—*prolegomena*.

Herman Bavinck shifted Protestant Theology back to Calvin’s emphasis on self-attestation as the only proper *prolegomena*.<sup>62</sup> As Frame says, “‘Prolegomena’ must be just as subject to Scripture as any area of theology—especially so, since prolegomena so greatly influences every phase of theological thinking. *All* our thoughts, ‘introductory’ and otherwise, must be captive to the obedience of Christ (2Cor. 10:5).”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Jue, “*Theologia Naturalis*,” 168-82; Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 74; Richard Muller, *PRRD* 1:37- 42. Compare Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 83-112.

<sup>59</sup>Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s, 1980), 44, 81-86; cf. Anthony Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 280-81; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 28* in *NPNF2*, 288 (where the task of the theologian is “being moulded and moulding others by Holy Scripture”); idem, *Oration 29* in *NPNF2*, 302; idem, *The Fourth Theological Oration* in *NPNF2*, 309; Aug., *Exposition 11 of Psalm 118*; idem, Letter 111.2 in *WorksStAug*; Against Faustus, 33.9 in vol. 4 of *NPNF*.

<sup>60</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1991), 1.1.2-4.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.3.2-3.

<sup>62</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7. Also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*.

<sup>63</sup>John Frame, “The Problem of Theological Paradox,” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2008), 299; emphasis original.

Self-attestation is not a doctrine invented by the Reformers. It was an assumption throughout the history of the church. It was revived by Calvin, as a way of confronting the church's overstepping of her boundaries. Due to length constraints, this chapter will highlight prominent figures as conversation partners representative at varied chronological breaks. The Patristic period will be represented by Augustine—buttressed with a discussion on Irenaeus.<sup>64</sup> The Reformation will be seen through the eyes of the theologian of the Spirit, John Calvin.<sup>65</sup> The post-Reformation will be represented through the writings of John Owen.<sup>66</sup> Finally, the modern period will be represented by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and Herman Bavinck's theology of Scripture—the former representative of American theological methodology, the latter representing European methodology. Each of these figures will be seen through the lens of self-attestation.

Chapter 3 summarizes the post-conservative theological methodology.<sup>67</sup> In the contemporary evangelical scene, post-conservatives Stanley Grenz and John Franke have denied the very doctrine that grounds, not merely evangelical theology, but Protestant

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<sup>64</sup>Augustine is an obvious choice. Irenaeus is treated, albeit briefly, since he informs an apologetic method that begins with Scripture. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 398.

<sup>65</sup>An all too brief summary of medieval theology will be offered to give historical context to Calvin's ecclesial and theological situation.

<sup>66</sup>Owen gave a full-fledged defense of Scripture's authenticity and authority in his *On the Divine Originals of the Scriptures*, a defense devoted to the subject that was unique at that time.

<sup>67</sup>The term "post-conservative" has been selected for this dissertation considering those who will be evaluated have sought to move past evangelical conservatism (see Grenz, *Renewing the Center*); although "postfoundational" is another viable option (so Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*). Other terminology has been proposed—such as "postmodern" (see Frederic B. Burnham, ed., *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006]) or "neo-evangelical" (see Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991]). Further, the name was fomented in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); as well as Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering*

theology by denying Scripture's self-attestation. In their book, *Beyond Foundationalism*, they say, "The authority of scripture does not ultimately rest with any quality that inheres in the text itself but with the work of the Spirit who speaks in and through the text, the Spirit who calls the community into existence (producing and authorizing the texts of Scripture) is the ultimate authority. Since he is the author of the community, tradition can be embraced more readily."<sup>68</sup> Denying Scripture's self-attestation they opt for the community of faith as the integrating motif of Scripture.<sup>69</sup>

As such, Grenz and Franke will be the main conversation partners for this dissertation since they have written extensively and have been the forerunners of an explicitly postmodern, or post-conservative, approach to theology. Such post-conservatives have chosen one aspect of self-attestation, namely illumination, as the ground for why anyone should submit to Scripture's authority.<sup>70</sup> What is at stake is a revision of the traditional notion of self-attestation. If the Christian community arbitrates what is and is not Scripture (by imbuing authority to the texts) the canon is a fluid document—and can be changed when the community sees fit.<sup>71</sup> At the end of the day, the Christian is left with a corporate subjectivism rather than an objective standard.

Following the contemporary landscape chapter will be a two-chapter biblical

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*Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). For the purposes of continuity, the term "post-conservative" will be used throughout.

<sup>68</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 115.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 209; cf. Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 214.

<sup>70</sup>Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 58; cf. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 180-81.

<sup>71</sup>Although post-conservatives may deny this, the implication is apparent since authority ultimately resides in the Spirit empowering the community to recognize varied texts. What is ironic is that post-conservatives appeal to the objective quality of Scripture's self-witness (namely, the prophets and

treatment—OT and NT, respectively. In the OT section (chap. 4), a theology of the Word of God will be described as it relates to the *a se* God's speech in the world and his representatives who convey his commands. What is the relationship of God's speech-acts to the formation of the covenant community? How are these speech-acts performed? The answer resides with Moses and the prophets. Just as Moses spoke face to face with God, so the prophets were called and sent by YHWH to speak to his people. Attention will be paid to the major prophets—Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Elijah—showing their call as being paradigmatic for speaking for God. Additionally, their incarnational representation of YHWH to the people will be evaluated as syntactical ambiguity forces the reader to blend God's speech with his prophet's speech.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the words of the prophet must be obeyed because he speaks on God's behalf—as though YHWH himself stands before the people speaking to them.

The covenant people assumed that what the prophet spoke was God's very words. There were two aspects to the prophetic speech (just like the doctrine of self-attestation itself)—objective and subjective. The former had to do with call of the prophet, his ethic, and his message. Did his lifestyle and teaching cohere with the words given to the people in earlier covenantal stipulations? That is, if the prophet worshipped Ba'al, he was not speaking on God's behalf. If his message encouraged people to go after other gods, he was not to be heeded. The latter had to do with the result and reception by the people. The subjective element *depended* upon the objective element. If the prophet is

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apostles), but deny the inherent and objective authority needed to be consistent with their defense of a closed canon.

<sup>72</sup>That is, there is an intentional ambiguity in the text that blends the message of God with the words of the messenger so that the reader is forced to affirm the prophet as God's very representation on earth for the people.

a true prophet, then it was necessary for the people to obey.<sup>73</sup> The objective element was essential in differentiating the false from the true prophets (inspiration); the subjective element was essential for recognizing that what was spoken was God's word to the people (illumination).

The Israelite community regarded the words of the canonical prophets as unique from the priests in that they preserved written copies of their messages.<sup>74</sup> The people of God formed their lives around God's word; the Temple acts not only as the center of Israelite life and the footstool of God, but also as "the shrine of the canon."<sup>75</sup> And so, "The public reading of Old Testament books in worship seems to have been a result, not a cause, of their canonicity. . . . It is as a rule of faith and practice that Scripture, and therefore an incipient canon of Scripture, first makes itself evident in the history of Israel."<sup>76</sup> The writing down of tradition solidified and provided contours for the people of Israel—as God's people, organized under his word.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>It is necessary to understand the salvation-historical distinction for the work of the Spirit as he empowered particular people for service and the indiscriminate outpouring of the Spirit in the New Covenant Age. God set up a cultus in the Old Covenant that represented him. The Spirit in the New Covenant came upon all people who believed, giving them discernment once the cultus of the Old Covenant was fulfilled and dissolved.

<sup>74</sup>James Crenshaw, "Transmitting Prophecy Across Generations," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael Floyd (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 32. See also Walther Zimmerli, "From Prophetic Word to Prophetic Book," in *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 419-42.

<sup>75</sup>Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 80.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 64-65; emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup>On a similar note, Anderson writes, "Lapointe described the shift from the old to the new, from a band of slaves to a people with identity. Fixation in writing is a momentous event, for the written product is not necessarily identical with the oral word that it replaces. Indeed, there is a profound difference; but one should guard against the romantic notion that the oral word is superior." Bernhard Anderson, "Tradition and Scripture in the Community of Faith," *JBL* 100, no. 1 (1981): 11.

The NT treatment (chap. 5) will begin by looking at the gospels, preeminently depicted by John's Gospel. Why did John relate Jesus with YHWH's word in the OT in his prologue? Throughout John's Gospel, it will be shown, the word of God serves as its adhesive. This chapter will also look at how Hebrews conceptualizes Christ's work as YHWH's final prophet. Of particular interest is the way he links God's speech with the exact imprint of God's nature when speaking of Christ. Whereas the OT prophets were mere impressions of YHWH to the people, Jesus is YHWH in the flesh.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the gospels, it is clear that Jesus demands obeisance because of who he is. Those who submitted his teaching to natural theology were rebuked (John 3:1-21; 6:1-14, 41-69; 7:14-24; 8:12-20; 9:1-10:6; 11:17-23). Christ's words were in accord with the already-given covenant documents—the Tanakh. Further, because he came from above his words carried authority; the only court of appeal was God—and he is God. Whereas rabbis interpreted what Moses said in the Torah, Jesus placed his words on par with Moses' words. Not the smallest stroke will pass away from Moses' nor Jesus' words.<sup>79</sup> What is more, Jesus claimed fulfillment to the Mosaic expectation.

Jesus said, "You have heard it said. . . . But I say to you." In this, Jesus claimed a higher authority than all the rabbis and interpreters. He spoke with authority because he, ontologically, was superior to all those prophets who came before. "Long ago, in many times and in many ways, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son" (Heb 1:1-2).<sup>80</sup> This is a superior

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<sup>78</sup>See also John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 28.

<sup>79</sup>Compare Matt 5:17-18 with 24:35. See also John 5:47 juxtaposed with 12:47-48.

<sup>80</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

communication because the Son gives it. It is not as though, however, the prophets who spoke before spoke with less authority; they gave a salvation-historical promise, which Jesus fulfilled. As the author of Hebrews metes out in the rest of the book, the Son fulfills OT expectations in his Incarnation.<sup>81</sup> Persons from above need no authentication outside themselves; they are the highest authority. This is why the Father is the one who verifies and testifies to the Son's authenticity and authority.<sup>82</sup> As Van Til said, "The self-contained God is self-determinate. He cannot refer to anything outside that which has proceeded from himself for corroboration of his words."<sup>83</sup>

Just as YHWH commissioned and sent his prophets so that others might "hear but not understand" and "see but not discern" (Isa 6:9-13), Jesus was the Sent One in order to accomplish the same mission (John 12:37-41; Matt 13:13-15). Further, Jesus sent out the apostles as New Covenant prophets to continue this mission of proclamation and indictment (Acts 28:23-31). The apostles were authoritative because they had been with Jesus (Mark 3:14; cf. Acts 4:13) just as Moses received authority because he continually

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<sup>81</sup>He is superior to the angels/messengers, to Moses, to the prophets, to the priests.

<sup>82</sup>Luke 9:35; John 17:1.

<sup>83</sup>Cornelius Van Til, introduction to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 36. He goes on to say, "The mind of man is itself in all of its activities dependent upon and functional within revelation. So also it is, as already made clear, with respect to the material that confronts it anywhere. All the facts are through and through revelational of the same God that has made the mind of man. If then appeal is made from the Bible to the facts of history or of nature outside the Bible recorded in some documents totally independent of the Bible it must be remembered that these facts themselves can be seen for what they are only if they are regarded in the light of the Bible. It is by the light of the flashlight that has derived energy from the sun that we may in this way seek for an answer to the question whether there be a sun. This is not to disparage the light of reason. It is only to indicate its total dependence upon God. Nor is it to disparage the usefulness of arguments for the corroboration of the Scripture that comes from archaeology. It is only to say that such corroboration is not of independent power. It is not a testimony that has its source anywhere but in God himself. Here the facts and the principle of their interpretation are again seen to be involved in one another. Thus the modern and the orthodox positions stand directly over against one another ready for a head-on collision." *Ibid.*, 36.

went into the tabernacle of meeting with YHWH (Deut 34:10; Exod 34:29-30; cf. Matt 17:2). Further, the apostles received authority when Jesus ascended and gave them his Spirit. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore . . .” (Matt 28:18; cf. John 20:22; Acts 1:8). They are able to go and speak on Jesus’ authority because he gave them his Spirit.

The relationship the apostles had with Jesus was the very thing they pointed to as objective proof of their authority (John 1:14; Acts 4:20; 9:4; 22:7; 26:14; 2 Cor 12:2; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:14; Rev 1:2). The authority to speak words demanding obedience can only originate from God. Since the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles had been with God they obtained the right to speak such words. Additionally, the ethic and message were confirmatory proofs that the apostles spoke the very words of God. These final two aspects stem from their initial relationship with Christ. Thus, the people of God listened to these men because they received authority from the risen Lord to be his spokesmen (Matt 28:18-20; John 20:22; Acts 1:8).<sup>84</sup>

The only criterion God’s people submitted the apostles to was their having been commissioned by Christ. In the same way, throughout history, the apostolic word has been assumed to be the very word of God. John Wenham writes,

The divine authentication of the New Testament was in two stages, which are sharply different in character. In the first stage Jesus directly appointed and trained the apostles as the authoritative teachers of the New Covenant, and they were recognized as such by the church. . . . In the second stage . . . the Holy Spirit guided the church in its recognition of certain ‘apostolic’ writings as being in fact additional scriptures.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 198.

<sup>85</sup>Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 109-10, 159.

Chapter 6 is brief and draws together several threads of the biblical discussion. It will serve as a bridge between the biblical data of chapters 4 and 5 and the application of the theology to the contemporary scene of apologetics in chapter 7. Of course, the biblical data cannot be read apart from the historical data, so in some ways this chapter will be constructed in light of the historical treatment of Scripture's self-witness (chap. 2). Themes that will be highlighted are God's aseity, Trinitarian communicative agency, God's relationship to the world through speech, the Spirit's relationship to the inscription of God's word, the Spirit's illumination of the believer, and speech-act theory. The data will be traced canonically so that the backdrop for Scripture's self-witness will be made clearer. Timothy Ward, John Frame, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Michael Horton will be the primary conversation partners in this section.

Chapter 7 assesses post-conservative arguments, showing that they are left with natural theology as the ultimate judge of what is God's Word. Not only this, but post-conservatives succumb to collective subjectivism (tradition and culture) as the true judge of what are God's communicative acts with his people. At the end of the day, post-conservatives are left with an evangelical brand of Roman Catholicism, since the community has the decisive word on what is God's word.

Cornelius Van Til offers another way by asserting that all human knowledge must be explicitly grounded in knowledge of God. If this does not happen "then man will have to seek knowledge within himself as the final reference point."<sup>86</sup> Any knowledge

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<sup>86</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 17.

man gains must have God and *his* interpretation of the world as its starting point.<sup>87</sup>

This last chapter will also summarize the views of self-attestation and offer a positive proposal for how to do theology starts from Scripture. As a result, *sola Scriptura* will be reaffirmed. Post-conservative methodology will be rejected. A test case in apologetics will be offered as a practical way in which a hearty affirmation of self-attestation will benefit the church in her defense of the faith. It will be shown that Grenz and Franke have adopted a form of RE, but have grossly modified the program. In fact, they go so far as to claim Reformed epistemologists are post-conservatives: “Does theological reflection and construction build upon something that we must presuppose? For the answer, these philosophers, like other nonfoundationalists, point to the believing community. In fact, this is in part what makes RE’s seemingly weak brand of foundationalism at the same time nonfoundationalist and decidedly postmodern.”<sup>88</sup> Such a statement misconstrues RE and equivocates nonfoundationalism with a “weak brand of foundationalism.” This will not do.

Alvin Plantinga has philosophically argued that the Christian is in his epistemic rights to believe the Bible is the word of God—he does not need to verify its veracity by anything outside of the Bible. He says,

[Christians] do not get their evidence or warrant by way of being believed on the evidential basis of other propositions. So from that point of view, these truths too

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<sup>87</sup>In order to begin the theological task, the doctrine of Scripture’s self-attestation must be affirmed. In fact A. T. B. McGowan believes that the doctrine of Scripture itself should be treated under the doctrine of God. Any discussion of God’s Word must have a discussion of God’s essence. That is, the Christian God is a speaking God—he is transcendent and immanent. For a helpful and provocative repackaging of this see A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007). McGowan seeks to place the doctrine of Scripture under the doctrine of theology proper.

<sup>88</sup>Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 201.

could be said to be self-evident—in a different and analogically extended sense of that term. They are evident, but don't get their evidence from other propositions; they have their evidence in themselves (and not by way of inference from other propositions). In this same extended sense, perceptual and memory beliefs too are self-evident.<sup>89</sup>

RE will be evaluated as helpful to systematic theology, but it will be concluded that, due to their denial of Scripture's inerrancy, a robust systematic theology is impossible.

Post-conservatives cannot abandon foundations no matter how hard they may try. Jargon may change (opting for terms like “unifying principle” instead of “foundation”), but the concepts remain the same. Recent attacks on evangelical doctrines, such as inerrancy result from denying Scripture's self-attestation and plenary inspiration. Most recently, Kenton Sparks and Craig Allert have challenged inerrancy and have written it off as nonessential—a resurrection of the Rogers-McKim proposal.<sup>90</sup> Although still claiming the mantle of “Evangelical,” inerrancy is eschewed due to external verifications of Scripture's authority. In other words, rather than beginning with Scripture's own testimony (and subsequent possible “defeaters”—to use Plantinga's terminology), these scholars have begun with methodological naturalism and done away with inerrancy. In this way, the Christian seeking certainty primarily needs to go to the church—not the Scriptures. As Hauerwas says (citing Stanley Fish), “There simply is no ‘real meaning’ of Paul's letters to the Corinthians once we understand that they are no

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<sup>89</sup>Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 262. He goes on to speak about why this doctrine is not a leap in the dark nor is it “even remotely like a leap in the dark.” Ibid., 263. So also Van Til, “Faith is not blind faith; it is faith in the truth, the system of truth displayed in the Scriptures. . . . It is this whole system of truth that is set forth in the Bible. The writers of Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit to set forth this system of truth. Thus the system is self-attesting.” Van Til, *Christian Theory*, 33; cf. *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>90</sup>Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999).

longer Paul's letters but rather the church's scripture."<sup>91</sup>

This final chapter also offers a positive definition followed by discussion of issues of inerrancy/infallibility, sufficiency, perspicuity, and tradition. Borrowing heavily from RE, an argument will be made for the viability of believing the Bible because it is the word of God. This will then lead to a discussion of circular reasoning—the assumption of its existence and the defense of its necessity. This chapter will close with application of the doctrine—answering the question, “Why does this matter?” It is this author's desire that Scripture's self-witness will be reaffirmed and the church will be better served as she has confidence in God's Word and is more apt to defend the Christian faith.

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<sup>91</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 20.

## CHAPTER 2

### A SELECTIVE AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SCRIPTURE'S SELF-ATTESTATION

This chapter treats the historical theology of Scripture's self-attestation. Any treatment of the church's history must necessarily be selective. In light of this, the summary is divided into four periods, allowing for clearer connections and synthesis.<sup>1</sup> First, the patristic period is examined in the writings of Irenaeus<sup>2</sup> and Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Second, discussion of Calvin as *exemplar* for the Reformation is offered, as he has been most often cited for the use of the *autopistia* of Scripture. Third, the post-Reformation period looks at John Owen's defense of Scripture's self-authenticating character,<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup>Each of these summaries would be worthy of a dissertation in their own right!

<sup>2</sup>Donald Fairbairn believes that Irenaeus is a good gauge to how the early church as a whole interpreted the OT; Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 119. Justo González places Irenaeus in a stream of hermeneutics that is primarily concerned with God's actions in history—with implications for pastoral labors; this is in contradistinction from Tertullian and Origen who begin from the pastoral, apologetic concerns and move to Scripture; Justo González, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 15, 48-59; also Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 111-19.

<sup>3</sup>Interspersed in this discussion are also other witnesses to the doctrine as they seem pertinent. While it would be preferable to have a section devoted to Aquinas, for the sake of brevity (and considering the extensiveness of Thomist research and interpretation) mere synthesis will have to be offered. This is not preferable, but entire dissertations and monographs have been devoted to Thomas's understanding of natural and special revelation. See Matthew Webb Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Pim Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000); Hugh Pope, *St. Thomas Aquinas as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1924).

<sup>4</sup>Owen will be used since he gave the only extended, *book-length* treatment to the doctrine of Scripture's self-witness; John Owen, *Of the Divine Originals of Scripture*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed.

fourth is the modern period exemplified in the theology of B. B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck. Most of the emphasis of this chapter resides in the historical treatment of Augustine and Calvin since they are considered theologians of the Spirit in their respective generations.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that the authority of Scripture as *the* ground for faith and practice has been the assumption throughout the history of the church. Over time, the Roman see commandeered more authority for itself; it was not until the Reformation that the issue of *autopistia* (Scripture as the sole ground for theology) had to be explicated in contrast to the subversion of it under the authority of the church.<sup>6</sup>

### Patristic Period

As the history of the church shows, the authority of the Bible was never doubted.<sup>7</sup> This study will look at two fathers to understand the nature of the *autopistia*—one Greek, the other Latin (Irenaeus and Augustine, respectively).<sup>8</sup> Since the word “self-

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William H. Goold, vol. 16 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988). Where applicable, contemporaries of Owen will be referenced.

<sup>5</sup>Any discussion of Scripture’s self-witness must also include pneumatology. See Adam Kotsko, “Gift and *Communio*: The Holy Spirit in Augustine’s ‘*De Trinitate*,’” *SJT* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1-12; Elias Dantes, “Calvin, the Theologian of the Holy Spirit,” in *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 128-41. The doctrine of *autopistia* depends heavily on a proper pneumatology; that is, the *autopistia* and the *testimonium Spiritu sancti* are mutually dependent—each dealing with the objective and subjective aspects of Scripture’s self-authenticating character (as will become more explicit in the concluding chapter of this dissertation).

<sup>6</sup>So also A. M. Renwick, “The Authority of the Bible: The Attitude of the Reformers,” *EvQ* 19 (1947): 110-26.

<sup>7</sup>Nichols and Brandt write, “When, however, they wanted to make a particular point to these churches, they stepped out of the way and quoted the Bible. They didn’t defend it; they didn’t offer arguments for the authenticity of the text. They just quoted it, revealing the level of authority ascribed to the biblical books in the early church.” Stephen J. Nichols and Eric T. Brandt, *Ancient Word, Changing Worlds: The Doctrine of Scripture in a Modern World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 22. See also Jason B. Hunt, “Bavinck and the Princetonians on Scripture: A Difference in Doctrine or Defense?” *JETS* 53, no. 2 (June 2010): 319.

<sup>8</sup>Again, this selectivity is due to the nature of this chapter—viz., looking at representatives in each period to see if Scripture’s self-witness is the product of the Enlightenment, or a Western

attestation” is not used in a technical sense, the concept will need to be elucidated through the writings of the two fathers under evaluation.<sup>9</sup>

## **Irenaeus**

Irenaeus only knew Jesus through the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup> When he defends the faith of the church, he pleads from the Scripture. Entrenched in controversy against the gnostic sect of the Valentinians, his view of Scripture and its interpretation is a good meter by which to indicate how the other fathers argued. It is essential whenever evaluating a writer removed from the interpreter by a significant period of time and geographical distance and a myriad of cultural differences that the interpreter does not commit anachronistic readings. This is true both for this author as well as a corrective for those within the Roman Catholic Church that use men such as Irenaeus and Tertullian as a foil for how they argue for the tradition of the Roman see.<sup>11</sup> It is much better to view the apologetic of the early fathers (when arguing for the tradition of the church) as an

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philosophical concept, or an historical understanding believed throughout the Church’s life. By looking at two fathers from each side of Constantinople, it is hoped that Scripture’s self-witness was affirmed by both cultural orientations—East and West. Basil the Great (fourth century AD) says, “It is necessary that the first principles of every science should be self-evident” [Basil, *Homily on Psalm 115*; PG 30:104-105, quoted in Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 85].

<sup>9</sup>Van den Belt notes that the term did not come to be used in reference to the authority of Scripture until the Reformation; Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 86.

<sup>10</sup>Note *Fragment 53* and *Contra Heresies* 3.2.3 in *ANF*. So “If Irenaeus wants to prove the truth of a doctrine materially, he turns to Scripture, because therein the teaching of the apostles is objectively accessible. Proof from tradition and from Scripture serve one and the same end: to identify the teaching of the Church as the original apostolic teaching.” E. Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* [Assen, Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1954], 109; cf. *ibid.*, 83-84. “The authority of the apostles today comes to us through the written Word. Their continuing authority depends on the written Word; without it they would no longer be able to rule the church.” John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 55.

<sup>11</sup>See R. R. Williams, “Scripture and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Scripture and Tradition* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 120.

apologetic against religions that do not hold to the deity of Christ, or the humanity of Christ, or against those not listening to those commissioned by Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

The tradition Irenaeus speaks about is separated from the apostolic word by one generation. The text of Scripture exists for the benefit of the church but is not determined by it. Thus, there needed to be an apologetic which argued for a tradition that came from the apostles themselves—and not from false prophets and apostles. This is evident in the way Irenaeus looks to Polycarp as verification that what he teaches is connected to Christ. Polycarp (as recounted by Irenaeus) grounded his authority in his relationship to the apostle John and John’s inspired testimony. He writes,

[Polycarp] would speak of his familiar intercourse with John, and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord; and how he would call their words to remembrance. Whatsoever things he had heard from them respecting the Lord, both with regard to His miracles and His teaching, Polycarp having thus received [information] from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life, would recount them all *in harmony with the Scriptures*.<sup>13</sup>

**Scripture: Higher than tradition and culture.** In chapter 7 of *Contra Heresies*, Book 1, titled “How the Valentinians pervert the Scriptures to support their own pious opinions,” Irenaeus uses a now famous metaphor for those who pervert the Scriptures. He compares the writings of the church to a beautiful image of a king created out of jewels. The heretics “take this likeness of the man all to pieces . . . rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and

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<sup>12</sup>The kind of apologetic does not appear until many hundred years later when Augustine argued from the text of tradition against the Donatists. And from this point on, the tradition apologetic served as an exciting tool from those who help to the traditions inscripturated in Scripture. See Roland Teske, “Augustine’s Appeal to Tradition,” in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 172.

<sup>13</sup>Irenaeus *Fragment 2*; emphasis added.

even that but poorly executed.”<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus does not appeal to the divine interpretation of the church instantly. Rather, the weight of the argument lies in the fact that the heretics do not interpret Scripture the way Scripture demands itself to be interpreted. He writes, “These persons patch together old wives’ fables, and then endeavour, by violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found, to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions. We have already stated how far they proceed in this way with respect to the interior of the Pleroma.”<sup>15</sup>

In essence they intermingle the purity of the Scripture with the fables of the culture to make a religion to their liking. It is “a system which they falsely dream into existence, and thus inflict injury on the Scriptures, while they build up their own hypothesis.”<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus pleads with the heretics to take the jewels and restore them to their proper place. By putting the narrative of Scripture together correctly, the heresy will be confuted. How is someone to determine what is the correct order to restore the image of the king? The answer is found in the “rule of truth.” He replies that he “who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognise the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men make of them. For, though he will acknowledge the gems, he will certainly not receive

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<sup>14</sup>Irenaeus *Contra Heresies* 1.7.3.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

the fox instead of the likeness of the king.”<sup>17</sup> Another question is raised then: “What is this rule of truth?”

Considerable study has been offered to answer the question as to what the “rule of faith” or “rule of truth” is.<sup>18</sup> The phrase itself does not refer to Tradition in its entirety, but references the apostolic writings. The rule of faith is inextricably linked to the Scripture and the creeds as they originated from the apostles.<sup>19</sup> It is not the whole of the tradition, but “its principal part.”<sup>20</sup> The rule to which he refers is intimately connected to the apostolic train found in the context of the church. As Lampe writes: “Apostolicity, guaranteed by historical succession, was, indeed, the only weapon readily available with which to meet the attack of Gnostics with their bogus claims to apostolic succession and Montanists with their new revelations of the Spirit which, if unchecked, would have sought to produce a kind of second and spurious apostolic age.”<sup>21</sup> The *regula fides* was dependent on the proper interpretation of Scripture *as determined by Scripture*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1.7.4

<sup>18</sup>See Jonathan J. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας to the κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν: The Rule of Faith and the New Testament Canon,” in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 30-47; Everett Ferguson, “Paradosis and Traditio: A Word Study,” in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 3-29; Thomas F. Martin, “Augustine, Paul, and the *Veritas Catholica*,” in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 173-92.

<sup>19</sup>“The *regula veritatis* and the tradition of the Church are not an addition to the content of the Scriptures. The apostolic doctrine is found in the Scriptures, and this doctrine is preached by the Church” (Einar Molland, “Irenaeus of Lugdunum and the Apostolic Succession,” *JEH* (April 1950): 20).

<sup>20</sup>Yves M. J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 28-29.

<sup>21</sup>G. W. H. Lampe, “Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church,” in *Scripture and Tradition*, ed. F. W. Dillstone (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 42. See also Florovsky, who says, “The appeal to Tradition was actually an appeal to the mind of the Church, her *phronema*. It was a method to discover and

D. Jeffrey Bingham writes,

Scripture is such a normative part of Irenaeus's life that every aspect of his ministry is shaped by it. . . . In so doing he paves the way, through his ministry of disclosure, for the presentation of the apostolic tradition that now comes through the argument informed by the Scripture and the rule of faith in *Adv. haer.* 2-5. For him, disclosure of the error sets the stage for the presentation of the apostolic tradition; furthermore, even the prior arrangement of that stage is informed by Scripture. Scripture, fulfilled in the labor of the spiritually gifted, establishes the platform for the correcting force of the received rule of faith.<sup>23</sup>

There was never a Gospel without a tradition.<sup>24</sup> So also “there was never an apostolic kerygma without Scripture.”<sup>25</sup> At the end of the day, and as the ground for apologetics, human tradition cannot be appealed to; one must fly to Scripture. Tradition serves as the context of Scripture—Scripture being in existence from before the time of the apostles.<sup>26</sup> “The emphases in Irenaeus that the tradition derives from the apostles, that it is maintained in the church, and that it is transmitted orally (as well as in Scripture) were

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ascertain the faith as it had been always held, from the very beginning: *semper creditum*. The *permanence* of Christian belief was the most conspicuous sign and token of its truth: no innovations. And this permanence of the Holy Church's faith could be appropriately demonstrated by the witnesses from the past.” Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Norland, 1972), 98.

<sup>22</sup>So also R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954), 100; Martin, “Augustine, Paul, and the *Veritas Catholica*,” 173.

<sup>23</sup>D. Jeffrey Bingham, “The Bishop in the Mirror: Scripture and Irenaeus's Self-Understanding in *Adversus haereses* Book One,” in *Tradition & the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S. J.*, ed. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 67.

<sup>24</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1955), 2:98.

<sup>25</sup>Josef Rupert Geiselman, *The Meaning of Tradition* (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), 23. The implication of such a statement is that tradition *confirms* Scripture, it does not determine it.

<sup>26</sup>“Cyril of Alexandria can say with confidence that no point of doctrine is to be accepted unless it can be proved from Scripture, and he even instructs his baptismal candidates not to receive his own words as authoritative unless their veracity can be demonstrated from the divine Scriptures. In his epistle against the Pneumatomachi, Basil of Caesarea states boldly that human tradition counts for nothing in the settling of theological questions. Rather, it is the ‘God-inspired Scriptures’ that decide ‘the vote of truth.’” Armstrong, “From the κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας to the κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν,” 46; so also Ferguson, “*Paradosis* and *Traditio*,” 15.

dictated by the requirements of the polemic against Gnostics, who claimed their teaching came to them from the apostles in a secret oral tradition.”<sup>27</sup> This is manifest in Irenaeus’ charge: “The very fathers of this [gnostic] fable differ among themselves, as if they were inspired by different spirits of error. For this very fact forms an a priori proof that the truth proclaimed by the Church is immoveable, and that the theories of these men are but a tissue of falsehoods.”<sup>28</sup>

**Application of Scripture’s self-witness to apologetics.** In an effort to refute the heretics, Irenaeus systematically walks through the Valentinian teachings. With each movement he accomplishes two things: (1) he shows the inner inconsistencies of the Gnostic doctrine; (2) evaluates the Gnostic doctrines in light of the Scripture. Irenaeus continues his polemic in the second book with the same argumentation evident in the first book—the veracity and strength of the Christian faith, as evidenced in the Scripture itself, is in stark contrast to the secret, unverifiable, claims of the Gnostics. He writes: “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”<sup>29</sup> That which was learned from the apostles themselves is shown in the same section to be the canonical texts themselves and not a spoken authority as claimed by the gnostics.

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<sup>27</sup>Ferguson, “*Paradosis and Traditio*,” 12. Also of note for the authority of Scripture in Tertullian see Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture*, 172, 183-84.

<sup>28</sup>Irenaeus *Contra Heresies* 1.7.5

<sup>29</sup>Irenaeus *Contra Heresies* 2.1.1

Scripture that form the church and are entrusted to the church originate from the apostles, verily from Jesus himself. “If any one do not agree to *these truths*, he despises the companions of the Lord; nay more, he despises Christ Himself the Lord; yea, he despises the Father also, and stands self-condemned, resisting and opposing his own salvation, as is the case with all heretics.”<sup>30</sup> Since the Scriptures derive from the apostolic witness, they are the beginning place for apologetics. Once a heretic turns somewhere else, doubt is brought upon the divine origin of Scripture. He writes,

When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and [assert] that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For [they allege] that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but *vivâ voce*: wherefore also Paul declared, “But we speak wisdom among those that are perfect, but not the wisdom of this world.” And this wisdom each one of them alleges to be the fiction of his own inventing, forsooth; so that, according to their idea, the truth properly resides at one time in Valentinus, at another in Marcion, at another in Cerinthus, then afterwards in Basilides, or has even been indifferently in any other opponent, who could speak nothing pertaining to salvation. For every one of these men, being altogether of a perverse disposition, depraving the system of truth, is not ashamed to preach himself.<sup>31</sup>

Again, the link between Scripture and Tradition is nearly indistinguishable, for Irenaeus believes that the Tradition comes *from* Scripture:

But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. For [they maintain] that the apostles intermingled the things of the law with the words of the Saviour; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord Himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, indubitably, unsulliedly, and purely, have knowledge of the hidden mystery: this is,

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 2.1.2; emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 2.2.1.

indeed, to blaspheme their Creator after a most impudent manner! It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Scripture serves as the *principium* for dialogue about the truth of Christianity because they are the apostles' writings. During inscripturation, John, Matthew, Peter, and Paul are the verifiable and true witnesses to the Christ, insofar that one can *see* the succession of bishops. The historical succession Irenaeus appeals to serves as a proof to what the Scriptures claim for themselves. This is made plain when he writes,

Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth. For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?<sup>33</sup>

And again,

Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, and that no lie is in Him.<sup>34</sup>

When arguing with the heretics, Irenaeus uses Scripture to support his position—in spite of the heretics' distortion of it. They are out of line because they deny the tradition by

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 2.2.2.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 2.4.1.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 2.5.1

which the Scriptures have been handed down.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Tradition serves to confirm, not determine, the Scriptures.

**God and his revelation to the world.** The remainder of Irenaeus' *Adversus Heresies* can be summed up by saying that he sets forth the logical integrity of Scripture. The primary assumption he has in his setting forth the truth is that God has broken into history and revealed himself to men. This is evident in the testimony of Adam (5.17), Abraham (4.7), Moses (4.2; 4.10), and the prophets (4.11; 4.36); the trust in which Jesus had of the Hebrew Scripture (4.12-13; 5.1); and the reasonableness of the Christian faith (4.20)—in contrast to the fables of the gnostics. One should go to Scripture if he wants to know what God has said and rightly interpret the facts of history (5.17).<sup>36</sup> Polycarp (as recounted by Irenaeus) grounded his authority in his relationship to the apostle John—which he also intimately connects with John's inspired testimony.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Irenaeus argues from Scripture *first* since it is the testimony of God. When the skeptic asks how the believer knows it is what it says it is, he points to the historical testimony Scripture gives for itself and to the verifiable history as evidenced in the church.<sup>38</sup> He is not shy

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<sup>35</sup>Compare *ibid.*, 4.33

<sup>36</sup>Note in 5.15.1 he argues for the resurrection by appealing to Isaiah and Ezekiel for confirmation.

<sup>37</sup>Note Irenaeus *Fragment 2*.

<sup>38</sup>So, "The paradosis is report and kerygma, not a mere report concerning the historical Jesus, as the liberal theology of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century maintained. Neither, however, is it merely kerygma regarding Jesus, as Bultmann would have it. It is report and kerygma, or better still, report in the form of kerygma, a report of what happened in Jesus Christ, and kerygma, proclamation of the joyful message of salvation which has been realized in these historical events and which is made present again and again in the kerygma, so that we are summoned to 'hear' and to believe" (Geiselman, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 10-11).

about offering proofs, but they all serve to confirm the trustworthiness of Scripture, and it is the testimony *from* the Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

## Augustine

“We believe whatever the holy scripture [says], which has been placed on the highest summit of authority with certain and great proofs of its reliability.”<sup>40</sup> Thus Augustine answered his opponent Faustus. Augustine’s view of, use of, and reliance upon the Christian scriptures is the most fundamental element in understanding his theology—before neo-Platonism, or his studies in Milan, or his conversion,<sup>41</sup> or his see at Hippo. It is from Scripture that he found out who the Trinitarian God is and his role in that Great King’s city.<sup>42</sup>

**Man’s weakness: subjectivity and finitude.** Augustine says,

In order, therefore, that the human mind might be purged from falsities of this kind, Holy Scripture, which suits itself to babes, has not avoided words drawn from any class. It was therefore to purify the human spirit of such falsehoods that holy scripture, adapting itself to babes, did not shun any words, proper to any kind of thing whatever, that might nourish our understanding and enable it to rise up to the sublimities of divine things. . . . The divine scriptures then are in the habit of making

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<sup>39</sup>Not extra-biblical historical accounts.

<sup>40</sup>Augustine, *Answer to Faustus: A Manichean of The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske, (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007), 389.

<sup>41</sup>Though his conversion cannot be seen as divorced from his view of Scripture; see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 8.12.

<sup>42</sup>Augustine leaned upon the accuracy of the manuscripts to make arguments—as is evident in Augustine, *On the Trinity* of *NPNF*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 1.2.13, where his extended argument from Ps 82:6 to Deut 6:13 to Rom 1:25 to Phil 3:3 make it clear that he believed in a univocal message by God in the Bible (with varied human voices). Augustine, in the next paragraph, challenges the unconvinced to produce a better manuscript! For a detailed treatment of Augustine’s reliance upon and defense of the written word, see Raymond F. Collins, “Augustine of Hippo: Precursor of Modern Biblical Scholarship,” *LS* 12 (1987): 137-47.

something like children's toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below.<sup>43</sup>

Can a bucket contain the ocean? Thus, God entices humanity to taste of his goodness and truth, by dropping crumbs along the staircase to sublime understanding. Scripture itself is the tool he uses to heal man's weakness in understanding. Scripture is the objective standard outside of man's experience. Augustine's opponents "may actually come to realize that that supreme goodness does exist which only the most purified minds can gaze upon, and also that they are themselves unable to gaze upon it and grasp it for the good reason that the human mind with its weak eyesight cannot concentrate on so overwhelming a light, unless it has been nursed back to full vigor on *the justice of faith* (Rom 4:13)."<sup>44</sup>

The Bible is the antidote to sin's disease. Man needs a cure outside himself. It is true that people can comprehend the actual words of Scripture. Augustine also writes,

The faith whereby we begin to believe in him has a healing effect, so that we come to understand more. . . . How can anyone believe a preacher of the faith unless he or she at least understands the language that is spoken, not to mention all else? On the other hand, there must be some things that we cannot understand unless we first believe, for the prophet says, *Unless you believe, you will not understand* (Is 7:9, LXX).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Augustine *The Trinity* 1.1.2.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1.1.4; italics in cited edition. Compare also 1.2.8 and the Prologue to Book 2. See also *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.39.

<sup>45</sup>Augustine *Exposition 18 of Psalm 118* §3. He says again, "The law turned all sinners on earth into law-breakers, whether we think of the law imposed in paradise, or the law instilled in human nature, or the law promulgated in writing. . . . The function of law is to send us to grace. Not only does law bear witness to the justice of God to be revealed outside the law; it also turns those who have the law into law-breakers, to such a point that the letter is death-dealing. In either case, the fear it arouses forces us to flee to the life-giving Spirit, through whom every kind of sin is blotted out and charity is breathed into us, that we may act aright" (*Exposition 25 of Psalm 118* §5).

**Tradition under Scripture.** This ethical concern relates directly to the church.

Anne-Marie La Bonnardiere argues that Augustine was first a churchman before an apologist.<sup>46</sup> While it is not necessary to pit these two against each other, it is true that Augustine's primary concern was the church. The bishop was very concerned that variegated Latin translations not be read in the gatherings. He was preoccupied with two things: solidarity among the churches, and winning the unbeliever. The first concern (given the primitive understanding of the early church laity) is that if varied translations were read, the people might believe God's word was not uniform. Beyond a Western parochialism, Augustine wanted the Latin speakers to have the same text as the Greek speakers.<sup>47</sup> What is more, if the apostles confirmed the use of the Septuagint (LXX) in their practice, why should their disciples annul that practice?<sup>48</sup> The second concern betrays Augustine's perspective on the eclectic nature of the Hebrew manuscripts. That is, the LXX was preferred because it presented one document, whereas the MT appealed to varieties of scribal copies. In this way, the LXX seemed better for apologetic use in showing that God has spoken one message and the witnesses agree—there were no glosses or redactions.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Augustine was at great pain to show the unified character of Scripture.

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<sup>46</sup>Anne-Marie La Bonnardiere, "Augustine, Minister of the Word of God," in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. and trans. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 245-51.

<sup>47</sup>See Augustine *Letter 71* §4.

<sup>48</sup>Augustine *Letter 82* §35.

<sup>49</sup>"You [Jerome] will do very much good if you render that Greek scripture, which the seventy produced, into correct Latin, for the Latin we have is so different in different manuscripts that it is barely tolerable. And it rouses such suspicions that something else may be found in the Greek that one hesitates to quote or to prove something from it." *Letter 71* §6.

In Augustine's theology, there is a wedding between God's Word and the church. "In the scriptures we come to know Christ; in the scriptures we come to the Church. . . . Where we recognize Christ prophesying about himself in the psalm, *The Lord said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you,'* there we recognize the Church in the words that follow, *Ask me, and I shall give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession* (Ps 2:7-8)."<sup>50</sup> Augustine goes on to show eleven other places where Christ and the church are found side by side in the Scriptures.<sup>51</sup>

Seeing this obvious matrimony, many have been tempted to cite Augustine to support a view that the church bequeathed authority upon the Scriptures—thus making them canonical. Augustine wrote, "For my part, I should not believe the gospel except moved by the authority of the Church."<sup>52</sup> Polman has an excellent and extended discussion on this debated sentence, supporting the notion that Augustine's foundational authority was Scripture and not the church. He argues that readers should understand Augustine's words as an apologetic for his contemporaries. That is, many followed the paths of religions because of the leader. Augustine goes to the heart of the matter when

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<sup>50</sup>*Letter 105* §14-15; italics in cited edition. This opens up a discussion with regards to why Augustine did not debate at length as to which books should be included in the canon. He took the Church's acceptance of the canon as taught by the Council of Hippo.

<sup>51</sup>In an excellent study by Pio de Luis Vizcaino, Augustine believed Scripture is the testament to the inheritance given to the Church because of her relationship to God. That is, the Church has been entrusted with the testament of God. Thus, the Church and Scripture are inseparable. As Vizcaino says, "Which is the authentic Church of Christ: the Catholic or the Donatist? To be able to arrive at a positive solution, one needs to go one step more and to know what it means to be the Church. It is the case that she is the realization of the promise of God, that which is the inheritance left to Christ by the Father. How is that the inheritance? The answer will be found simply in the testament [which was also left by the Father]." Pio de Luis Vizcaino, "La Sagrada Escritura como 'Testamento' de Dios en la Obra Antidonatista de San Agustin," *Estudio Agustiniano* 15 (1980): 37 (author's translation).

confronting the grounding Manichean claim that Mani was an apostle of Jesus. He asks them where they will go to defend such a position. Ultimately, it is not in the Scripture!

Polman says,

St. Augustine considered this tradition to be purely formal, to the extent that he compared the handing on of Church tradition to the handing on of great works in profane literature. Still, he held that what could be said of profane literature was true *a fortiori* of the Church, since the apostolic Church as the faithful, numerous, and unanimous community of brothers, had the best possible chance of handing on Holy Scripture to successive generations, the more so since the established succession of bishops was a guarantee of its unbroken transmission from the time of the apostles.<sup>53</sup>

Further, quoting Warfield, he says, “Augustine’s appeal to the Church as authenticating the Scriptures is to the Church as a *witness*, not as an *authorizer*.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, “those who claim . . . that, according to Catholic doctrine, the infallible magisterium of the Church is the infallible guarantee of the divine inspiration and canonicity of the Holy Scriptures, cannot cite St. Augustine in their support.”<sup>55</sup>

John Calvin lends additional support when he says regarding Augustine’s words, “Augustine is not, therefore, teaching that the faith of godly men is founded on the authority of the church; nor does he hold the view that the certainty of the gospel depends upon it. He is simply teaching that there would be no certainty of the gospel for unbelievers to win them to Christ if the consensus of the church did not impel them. And this he confirms a little later.”<sup>56</sup> But did Calvin interpret Augustine rightly?

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<sup>52</sup>Augustine *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental* 5 §6.

<sup>53</sup>Polman, *The Word of God*, 195.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*; emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 1.7.77.

Michael Horton confirms Calvin's interpretation: "Regarding Augustine's famous maxim ("I would not have come to believe the Scriptures. . ."): [The maxim] is nothing more than the relation of his own experience of *how he came to faith* rather than the source of the faith's authority (I.7.3). Unless the credibility of doctrine is established by divine rather than human authority, our consciences will always waver."<sup>57</sup>

Horton then enters into the early church's world and allows the Roman interpretation, for the sake of argument. Given what has already been seen in Augustine, Horton is right in making this scathing inference from the Roman premise: "If the ancient church recognized post-apostolic tradition as an extension of apostolic tradition, why did their criteria for recognizing canonicity limit authorized texts to those of apostolic origin? Surely these ancient bishops did not regard tradition as a form of ongoing revelation; in fact, it was precisely against this view of the Gnostics that fathers like Irenaeus inveighed."<sup>58</sup> If the church conferred authority upon the Scriptures, then it would seem that writings from the disciples of apostles should be inscripturated as well. Yet, authoritative Scripture ended with the death of the Apostle John.

Abraham Kuyper gets at the issue helpfully:

In this saying, the Church appears not merely as the preacher of truth, but as an imposing phenomenon in life which exerts a moral power, and which, itself being a work of Christ, bears witness to the "founder of the Church" (*auctor ecclesiae*). It is the revelation of the spiritual power of Christ in His Church, which as a spiritual reality takes hold of the soul. For this very reason the interpretation of this word of Augustine by the Romish dogmaticians, as an *auctoritas imperii*, or imperial authority, to be attributed to the instituted Church, is wrong, and it was equally wrong to interpret the Gospel *Evangelium* as the "Inspired Sacred Scripture," for then Augustine should have begun by subjecting himself to this official authority of

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<sup>57</sup>Michael S. Horton, "Knowing God: Calvin's Understanding of Revelation," in *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 21.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

the Church. . . . What remains of this, therefore, is no other than what we, too, confess; viz. that as a herald of the Gospel (*preadicatrix Evangelii*) and as an imposing spiritual phenomenon, the Church is one of the factors used by the Holy Spirit in bringing the regenerate to a conscious faith in Christ.<sup>59</sup>

While Kuyper's interpretation leaves something to be desired,<sup>60</sup> it is his concluding sentence that brings light on what has been said before—regarding the apologetic thrust of Augustine's maxim. The church universal has been entrusted with the message of Christ as the apostles passed on the message to faithful men who would also entrust it to other faithful men. The church is where one encounters the message of the Cross. In this way, it is the *preadicatrix Evangelii*. This confirms what already is known in Augustine's interaction and refutation of the Manicheans—namely, that the prophet Mani was not known among the apostles, nor is he shown in Scripture to have been with Jesus. Thus, their authority is dubitable because their founder was not with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry (Acts 1:21-26; cf. Mark 3:14).

Further, Florovsky agrees with the above when he writes,

The phrase must be read in its context. First of all, St. Augustine did not utter this sentence on his own behalf. He spoke of the attitude which a simple believer had to take, when confronted with the heretical claim for authority. In this situation it was proper for a simple believer to appeal to the authority of the Church, from which, and in which, he had received the Gospel itself: *ipsi Evangelio catholicis praedicantibus credidi*. [I believed the Gospel itself, being instructed by catholic preachers]. The Gospel and the preaching of the *Catholica* belong together. St. Augustine had no intention "to subordinate" the Gospel to the Church. He only wanted to emphasize that "Gospel" is actually received always in the context of Church's catholic preaching and simply cannot be separated from the Church. Only in this context it can be assessed and properly understood. Indeed, the witness of the Scripture is ultimately "self-evident," but only for the "faithful," for those who have

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<sup>59</sup>Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Henrik De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 555.

<sup>60</sup>By him merely saying "it is the revelation of the spiritual power of Christ in his Church," he still leaves open the Roman interpretation of the matter. The RCC teaches that the power of Christ by mediation of his Spirit is most evident in the Church—the Roman see, that is.

achieved a certain “spiritual” maturity,—and this is only possible within the Church. He opposed this teaching and preaching *auctoritas* of the Church Catholic to the pretentious vagaries of Manichean exegesis. The Gospel did not belong to the Manicheans. *Catholicae Ecclesiae auctoritas* [the authority of the Catholic Church] was not an independent source of faith. But it was the indispensable principle of sound interpretation. Actually, the sentence could be converted: one should not believe the Church, unless one was moved by the Gospel. The relationship is strictly reciprocal.<sup>61</sup>

It has been necessary to look at varied interpretations of Augustine’s maxim since it was a major hinge in the disputes between Rome and the Reformers. Eck used the saying to ground his explanation that the church confers authority on the text of Scripture, while the Reformers sought to place it in Augustine’s context of apologetics against the Manichees. Essentially, what Augustine does is point to the historical verifiable facts that Scripture comes through the instrument of the church. As Teske writes, “Augustine’s appeal to tradition against the Manichees is essentially an appeal to the Church as the bearer and custodian of the canonical Scriptures that have been handed down in the Church by a succession of bishops from the time of the apostles.”<sup>62</sup> This quotation raises the issues treated in the next two sections: self-attestation and apologetics.

**Scripture’s self-attestation.** The doctrine of how the faithful know Scripture’s claim to be Scripture (self-attestation) goes to the heart of the debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Given Augustine’s tight-knit understanding of the church and the Scripture, how does he speak about the canonization of Scripture?

Now what can God’s testimonies be, if not those things by which he bears witness to himself? A testimony is the means by which something is proved. Thus God’s ways of justice and God’s commandments are attested by God. If God wants to

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<sup>61</sup>Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 92.

<sup>62</sup>Teske, “Augustine’s Appeal to Tradition,” 159.

persuade us of anything, he persuades us by his own testimonies. . . . By his testimonies God gives us good reason to worship him disinterestedly, but the obstacle to worshipping gratis is covetousness, the root of all evils.<sup>63</sup>

God bears witness to himself in his Scripture. The prophets and apostles are his spokesmen. Augustine throughout his argumentation places at the feet of his opponents the words of Scripture—and asks them to give a rational accounting for why Scripture says thus. Additionally, he introduces the Scripture quotations with “Scripture says” or “as the apostle says.” This betrays a concursive view of inspiration (God speaks through the words of the apostles—in such a way that Paul’s words and personality are his own, as well as being God’s words to his people). So in the teaching where Christians will be persecuted in this life, Augustine couples Jesus’ words in Luke 12:48-49 with those of Paul in Romans 8:18 so that they buttress each others’ arguments—in fact, the bishop says, “For this reason the apostle says . . .” so that Paul’s statement is threaded into the argument of the Lord!<sup>64</sup>

As mentioned above, one of Augustine’s primary apologies against Faustus was that of Faustus’ relationship to the church—his being outside of the apostolic blessing. Augustine writes,

If you want to follow the authority of the scriptures, which is to be preferred to all the others, you should follow the authority that has come down to these times from the time of Christ’s presence, that has been preserved, handed on, and glorified in the whole world through the ministries of the apostles and through the certain succession of bishops in the sees.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Augustine *Exposition 11 of Psalm 118* §6; “disinterestedly” meaning “without selfish pretense.” See also Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s “De Trinitate”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 106-24.

<sup>64</sup>Augustine Letter 111 §2.1.

<sup>65</sup>Augustine *Answer to Faustus* 33.9.

The church did not add content or authority to Scripture but provided a “living context” by which people could rightly understand the apostolic message.<sup>66</sup>

Before they can believe what is plain to every person, the Manichean must repent and believe God’s testimony as handed down by the apostles:<sup>67</sup>

Since you will not be able to do this—for, as long as you are such people, you will in no way be able to—at least believe that idea, which is naturally implanted in every human mind, at least if it is not disturbed by the wickedness of a perverse opinion, namely, that the nature and substance of God is utterly immutable, utterly incorruptible, and you will immediately no longer be Manicheans, so that sometime you might also be able to be Catholics.<sup>68</sup>

Augustine appeals to his opponents’ God-given common sense as well as to the inerrancy of God’s own testimony handed down by the apostles.

We do not say that Mani should not be believed because he was not present for the words and actions of Christ and was born long afterward, but because he speaks about Christ in opposition to the disciples of Christ and in opposition to the gospel that is confirmed by their authority. For we have the words of the apostle [Peter] who saw in the Spirit that such persons would come. . . . If no one speaks the truth about Christ unless he was present and saw and heard him, no one speaks the truth about him today.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, Mark and Luke bear the same authority as Matthew and John because of their relationship with the apostles.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 79.

<sup>67</sup>“Day to day, saints telling saints, apostles telling the faithful, Christ himself telling the apostles.” Augustine *Exposition 2 of Psalm 18* §3.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>Augustine *Answer to Faustus* 17.3; also 27.2.

<sup>70</sup>The practice of the Catholic Church was handed down by the apostolic word. In Letter 35 he argues, “God commands that we speak and preach the word, that we refute those who teach what they ought not (Ti 1:11), and that we persist in time and out of time (2 Tm 4:3), as I prove from the words of the Lord and of the apostles, let no human being think that I should be persuaded to be silent about these matters.” Augustine *Letter 35* §3; italics in cited edition. Compare *Letter 36*, especially §16-20.

The very economy of salvation demands that God's words be prior to the church. As stated earlier, God's people depended on faithful preaching in accord with God's written word.<sup>71</sup> Consequent to the Fall, man is unable to understand the exquisite things of God; yet, God's people recognize the preached word as his voice and words (John 10:27). Polman writes,

Whatever is accepted into the canon, is a true prophecy inspired by God, and has the authority of religion. And the true people of God, to whom the Words of God are entrusted, have the gift of distinguishing between true and false prophets and between what was written by divine inspiration and what by human diligence. In this distinction they apparently applied the complete inner harmony of all divine writings as a yardstick.<sup>72</sup>

Even against his own embraced tradition, Augustine writes,

Who can fail to be aware that the sacred canon of Scripture both of the Old and New Testament, is confined within its own limits, and that it stands so absolutely in a superior position to all later letters of bishops, that about it we can hold no manner of doubt or disputation whether what is confessedly contained in it is right and true; but that all the letters of bishops which had been written, or are being written, since the closing of the canon, are liable to be refuted, if there be anything contained in them which strays from the truth; and that even of the universal Councils, the earlier are often corrected by those which follow them, when things are brought to light which were before concealed?<sup>73</sup>

All practice and doctrine must submit and conform to Scripture.

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<sup>71</sup>Thus, it is not Scripture, narrowly speaking—as though God's people did not exist before inscripturation, but God's word broadly—his powerful word prior to inscripturation. In this way, God's word is prerequisite for belief (given what has already been quoted of man's necessity of the divine word and commands).

<sup>72</sup>Polman, *The Word of God*, 183; after citing Augustine's *City of God* 18.41.3. Polman has an extended discussion on self-attestation in Augustine's writing on pp. 203-05 of his monograph. "We do better to listen to the Holy Spirit who commands us through the prophet." Augustine, Letter 108 §3; cf. *Letter 9* and *Letter 82* §2. Wieslaw Dawidowski also points to this integral relationship between Church and Scripture in speaking of a type of hermeneutical circle. Unfortunately, because of a failure to link tradition, Christ's words, and inscripturation, the author, like so many others, have bifurcated tradition and Scripture. That is, the tradition Paul and the apostles passed down was inscripturated—and, thus, became canon law for the Church. See Wieslaw Dawidowski, "Regula Fidei in Augustine: Its Use and Function," *Augustinian Studies* 35 (2004): 254-60. Compare Augustine *Confessions* 13.34 and 13.15: "For you yourself are their book and you for ever are." That is, God is his Book.

**Self-attestation and apologetics.** Scripture's beauty sets it apart from the prose of Cicero and the philosophy of Plato.<sup>74</sup> Augustine writes to Dioscorus (a student who asked him about Cicero's writing),

It requires no knowledge of Cicero's dialogues and of a collection of contradictory maxims begged from others in order to gain hearers. Let those who are going to receive from you such a teaching become attentive because of your moral conduct. I do not want you first to teach something that must be unlearned in order that you may teach the truth. For if the knowledge of other dissident and contrary views in some way helps the teacher of the Christian truth to know how to destroy opposing errors, it helps at least so that anyone arguing in opposition does not set his eye only on refuting your views while he carefully hides his own.<sup>75</sup>

Understanding Scripture is to have first place in the Christian's life and apology. It can be helpful to know what other writers say, but the most important script is that of Scripture.<sup>76</sup>

In his *City of God*, Augustine transitions from Part 1 (a recounting of the history of the world with special reference to Rome) to Part 2 (a biblical view of the history of the world with special reference to Rome) in Book 10.<sup>77</sup> He refutes the teaching of Porphyry and exposes the false claims of "theurgy."<sup>78</sup> He explains that God has

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<sup>73</sup>Augustine *On Baptism* 2.4.

<sup>74</sup>Though this is not how he viewed the Scripture's initially: "To me [the Scripture] seemed quite unworthy of comparison with the stately prose of Cicero, because I had too much conceit to accept their simplicity and not enough insight to penetrate their depths." Augustine *Confessions* 3.6.

<sup>75</sup>Augustine *Letter 118* §11-12.

<sup>76</sup>The irony of this thinking by Augustine is that there is not one quotation of Scripture in this letter. More could be evaluated; suffice it to say that Augustine meets Dioscorus where he is in the study of Scripture. He gains a hearing by showing his knowledge of pagan writer's—and subsequently showing their futility.

<sup>77</sup>He masterfully has already entered into the world and shown himself knowledgeable of what has happened and begins to argue that the Christian Scripture should be heeded.

<sup>78</sup>Augustine *City of God* 10.10. Although finding common ground between the two worldviews in the affirmation of the one God (by Platonists and Christians).

mediated miracles in the seen world through his angels. These miracles also give credence to God's written testimony contained in the Ark of the Testimony. He says,

The philosophers, and in particular the Platonists, have won praise for wisdom superior to the rest of mankind . . . for having taught that divine providence controls even the lowest things on the earth, producing as evidence all the thousands of beauties found not only in the bodies of living creatures but even in blades of grass. If this is so, how much clearer is the witness to divine power in the miracles which take place at the moment when the religion is presented to men which forbids sacrifice solely to the one God, who alone gives us happiness by his love for us and our love for him.<sup>79</sup>

One should trust eyewitnesses more than tales.

He goes on to say, in refutation of those who deny the credibility of the church's books, "Is anyone going to say that those miracles are false; that they never happened, but were lies invented by writers of Scripture? Anyone who says this, and asserts that in these matters no reliance is to be placed on any written evidence, can go on to say that none of the gods has any concerns for the affairs of mortals."<sup>80</sup> In other words, the pagans admit that the gods have concern for their affairs (perhaps too much!) and so they must concede this move in his argument. They assume that the miracles of their religion are true, why not also the miracles that verify the Christian religion and books?

Augustine then, forcefully, shows the inconsistency in Porphyry's thought—particularly the flaccid differentiation between God and demons and his anemic soteriology. This plants doubt in the neo-Platonists mind as to how he can trust such an unreliable authority. Thus Part 1 ends, with the neo-Platonist ship tottering.

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 10.17. Note, again, he is appealing to the eyewitness testimony of the apostles and canonical writers.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 10.18. He goes on to say, "Then why do they refuse credence to the record of such events in those writings which should be held most trustworthy in proportion as the God for whom they reserve all sacrificial worship is great above all others?"

Part 2 begins with vigor. He starts by asserting the incomparable authority of the canonical Scriptures. Following on the knowledge of the true God through the one Mediator (the God-Man), Augustine explains that this Mediator:

Spoke in former times through the prophets and later through his own mouth, and after through the apostles. . . . He also instituted the Scriptures, those which we call canonical. These are the writings of outstanding authority in which we put our trust concerning those things which we need to know for our good, and yet are incapable of discovering for ourselves. Now we ourselves are our own witnesses for the knowledge of things which are within reach of our senses, whether interior or exterior. . . . And so we clearly need other witnesses for things which are out of reach of our senses, since we cannot base our knowledge on our own evidence; and we trust the witnesses of those who, we believe, have, or have seen them, and similarly with respect to things related to the various senses. . . . *In respect of invisible things which are out of reach of our own interior perception, we ought likewise to put our trust in witnesses who have learnt of those things, when they have been once presented to them in that immaterial light, or who behold them continually so displayed.*<sup>81</sup>

Scripture is to have first place in the Christian's apologetic arsenal. Knowledge of other literature is helpful insofar that it shows Scripture's preeminence. TeSelle writes,

Revelation and true philosophy converge not only in a common source but in a common goal, the wisdom in which man finds happiness. The focus of attention in Augustine's discussions of faith and reason is rarely upon the cognitive aspect in isolation from the practical or existential; when he mentions the former, he soon looks to the latter: the *true philosophy has given men a knowledge of the intelligible world*, and to it they strive to return. It is in connection with this practical task, not the cognitive, that Augustine speaks of the indispensable role of authority and the need to be shown the way to return toward God, and *God in his 'clemency' has made it known*, but the philosophers in their pride have scorned the humble form in which God appeared to men.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 11.3; emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup>Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 74; emphasis added. See also idem, 73. Note the connection TeSelle also makes between ethics and apologetics for Augustine.

Since Cicero and Plato were made in God's image, they will speak true things at times; it is only from the pen of God's witnesses, however, that man can be saved from his weakness and hubris.

Thus, Augustine's theology of Scripture ends where it began—on the summit of God's holy mountain. Scripture is paramount. All other philosophies reflect (to different degrees) the excellencies revealed by God in his Word.

Not even traditions (which Augustine valued) have priority. In contrast to the traditions of the ancients, Augustine says (expounding Ps 119:100),

Your commandments, not human injunctions; your commandments, not the commandments of the elders who, though aspiring to be doctors of the law, understand *neither what they are saying nor the matters on which they pronounce* (1Tm 1:7). To those who set their own authority above the truth, the question was justly addressed, *And you, why do you transgress God's commandment to establish your own tradition?* The divine commandments are to be earnestly sought, that they may be understood better than those elders understood them.<sup>83</sup>

Just as the Lord confounded the elders when only a youth by resting authority on Holy Writ, the Christian must judge his own context's practices by the canon of Scripture.

Faustus denied that Jesus was born to Mary, from the line of David—a direct contradiction to Scripture. Augustine replies,

Let him, therefore, prove that she did not belong to the family of David, and let him show this not from just any writings but from those that are ecclesiastical, canonical, and Catholic. Other writings certainly do not have in our eyes any weight of authority regarding these matters. For these writings are the ones that the Church, which is spread throughout the whole world, accepts and holds.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Augustine *Exposition 22 of Psalm 118* §4.

<sup>84</sup>Augustine *Answer to Faustus* 23.9.

If anything contained in Scripture runs across the grain of man's typical experience (floating axe heads, virgin births, and resurrections from the dead), the reader is to submit.<sup>85</sup> Polman concludes,

Not even the universal council of the Church is infallible, for infallibility is the exclusive prerogative of Holy Writ. . . . [Augustine] also showed that the same criticism applied to his own works. These have authority only in so far as they reflect the clear evidence of God's Word, for, in that case, they speak, not with human, but with divine authority, and can therefore be accepted by one and all.<sup>86</sup>

To summarize: Since the Father has spoken definitively in his Son Jesus, all Creation must submit to his Word. He owns all things and all things owe him obeisance. Councils and philosophies must bend the knee to what God has actually spoken—as testified to by the apostolic witness in Scripture. The Bible stands alone on the summit of God's communication. Man, most assuredly, can learn from natural revelation, pagan philosophies, and religious tradition; but these all must give account before the judgment seat of his Word. Ultimate authority resides in Scripture because it is spoken by God and is more perspicuous than natural revelation.

Diverse genres and personalities all give unified testimony to God's own revelation in the Son. Jesus is the point at which all witnesses converge. He holds them together by his powerful word. May it never be that God's Word is charged with error—any more than Jesus is charged with sin. May obscure and hard to understand teachings in Scripture be submitted to and attributed to divine mysteries and human weakness rather than there be error in Scripture. Since the goal of history is the redemption of the world,

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<sup>85</sup>See *ibid.*, 26.3. See also Augustine *Letter 93* §24.

<sup>86</sup>Polman, *The Word of God*, 66. Polman cites Hermann Reuter, *Augustinische Studien* (Gotha, Germany: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1887), 340ff, as an unrefuted theory that Augustine was, in fact,

God's Word forms the wake after which all events follow. In this way, God's people follow the Christ and pursue holiness—just as he is holy.

God's people heed his Word as is clear from its own testimony. By the life practiced by the faithful, may the unbelieving be converted and follow in his train up the mountain of God. Alan Richardson aptly condenses,

The doctrine that the authority of the Bible must be made known to the believer by the operation of the Spirit in his heart is one for which support could be found in the writings of practically every leading theologian of the Church in every age. It is, after all, but reasonable to assert that God, and no one except God, can adequately attest the truth of divine revelation.<sup>87</sup>

We can sum up both Irenaeus and Augustine in this way: Because God has spoken, his words are the only foundation for faith and practice. The church serves as the proof of God's institution of the community from the foundation of Christ to the apostles. Thus, the church serves as an apologetic proof to the veracity of the authority of Scripture.<sup>88</sup>

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speaking about the subservience of the Councils to the Scriptures—and he was not saying, as some have argued, that interpretations of Scripture by Councils err.

<sup>87</sup>Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* (London: SCM, 1955), 215-16.

<sup>88</sup>So *ibid.*, 217: "The church existed to be a witness to the resurrection of Christ, and the Church was the place where the Risen Presence of Christ was known." Unfortunately some have taken the proof of the Church's witness as a move away from the self-attesting authority of Scripture. Note how Cosgrove argues: "Marcion challenges both the perimetrical and editorial integrity of the Gospels by drawing a closer circle of authentic narrative and logia (Luke) and by critically sifting the contents of that circle. This forces the issue of authority, and the Great Church ultimately followed Marcion's idea of apostolic authority, although it widened the circle and resisted his critical approach to the accepted materials. This meant that the authority of the Jesus tradition no longer stood on its own dynamic and self-attesting. Now it was underpinned by apostolic authority in a way which it had not been, except perhaps ever so implicitly, up to that point. The Gospels are now viewed not only as literary guardians of the sacred tradition but as literary *guarantors* of that tradition. This is the decisive move and one which Justin apparently resists. The words of Jesus need no secondary props, for they possess intrinsic authority. They need not be defended apostolically, only adduced and allowed to go to work in their own strong way." (Charles H. Cosgrove, "Justin Martyr and the Emerging Christian Canon: Observations on the Purpose and Destination of the Dialogue with Trypho," *VC* 36 [1982]: 226.)

It is unfortunate because one cannot merely point to the Scriptures as though they fell from the sky. Rather, the historical nature of the Incarnation and ministry of Christ demands that we ask *who* wrote a particular Gospel in question. In this way, Marcion *helps* the cause of the Church by forcing parameters to be drawn around orthodoxy. Related to this need to differentiate between true writings and false writings,

## Reformation

At the risk of oversimplification, the period between the early church and the Protestant Reformation will need to be summarized. While the Scriptures were authoritative in and of themselves, the church for a variety of reasons (e.g., in an effort to earn a place at the philosophical table) began to give more credence to natural revelation than it had in the past. What was evident to all (natural revelation) served as the foundation for first principles in authenticating theology as a proper science. This is that much more evident in the Scholastics. As van den Belt writes in summary,

According to K. Heim, the Franciscan school of Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), Bonaventure (1257-1274) and Matthew of Aquasparta (1235-1302) regarded the truth as axiomatically self-evident; Scripture only offered a symbolic and material representation of the truth. Aquinas, on the contrary, taught that the truth was not

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Ehrman wrongly surmises: “While the entire church there [in Alexandria] seems to have agreed upon the canonical status of many books, there were others, notably several works of the Apostolic Fathers, that were still disputed. This means that although Athanasius listed no [Greek font used in original] *antilegomena* in his thirty-ninth Paschal letter, the category did exist in his church. Hence, rather than describing the status of the canon in Alexandria, Athanasius wrote a prescriptive canon, an “authoritative list of authoritative books.” The eventual acceptance of this canon demonstrates the personal influence he commanded (Bart D. Ehrman, “The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind,” *VC* 37 [1983]: 19).

The problem with this analysis is that it gives too much credence to the books he presumes are disputed. That is, even within the article Ehrman cites Didymus’ use of varied works of the Apostolic Fathers, but never are the citations in the original explained as being on par with the Apostolic writings. It is obvious that authority of interpretation and tradition is given to books like I Clement, but Didymus does not speak of it on the same authoritative level of Scripture. Further, Ehrman fails to take into account Athanasius’ 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter. Athanasius is not canonizing his list, he rather explains to another congregation what books are used catholically as they have been “handed down and confirmed as divine.” He admits there are other books that congregations believe helpful, but they are not considered Scripture (“other books besides these, which have not indeed been put in the canon, but have been appointed by the Fathers as reading matter for those who have just come forward and which to be instructed in the doctrine of piety”). As Ehrman cites Didymus’ use of the disputed writings, it is clear that Didymus is using the texts as interpretive and helps to understand the canonical Scripture.

This can also be seen in De Jonge’s treatment of how the early church treated the Pseudepigrapha. M. De Jonge, “The Transmission of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs by Christians,” *VC* 47 (1993): 1-28. See also Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 211-12; also 287-88 in refutation of Ehrman’s premise. See also the excellent article by Henric Nordberg, “On the Bible Text of St. Athanasius,” *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* (Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1962), 3:120-41—which analyzes Athanasius’s use of Scripture with text critical apparatus.

See also Nichols and Brandt, *Ancient Word*, 22; Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 75-77.

self-evident but contingent and that certainty depended on trust in Scripture and tradition. The Reformation offered a synthesis of both views in the *autopistia* of Scripture; Scripture has the evidence of the axioms, but its content is contingent. Though Scripture is self-evident, it does not have the compelling force of an axiom, but can only be accepted though [*sic*] faith.<sup>89</sup>

In this subtle way the areas of faith and fact become bifurcated.<sup>90</sup> In light of Rationalism, there were two kinds of truth: that which started from the text of Scripture and that which started from “chains of reasoning based on self-evident principles.”<sup>91</sup>

Further, K. Scott Oliphint offers a helpful synthesis of Thomist realism. “Is it the case that a realistic approach to universals, guided by Aquinas, can move us in the direction of a Christian epistemology?”<sup>92</sup> Where do universals fit in such a scheme? If theology begins with sense experience and attempts to surmise why things are the way they are, will it ever be able to work up to the existence of God? “Because Aquinas . . . seeks to begin with sense experience alone, he is never able to ‘see’ being except as diverse, interspersed throughout different things in which essence and existence come together. A truly transcendental notion must include a real totality such that one is able to allow for both unity and diversity in reality itself.”<sup>93</sup> In reference to Aquinas’ use of the hylomorphic principle: “Aquinas’ epistemological problem related to his metaphysics becomes acute at this point. How can that which is individualized in things be common in

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<sup>89</sup>Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 89.

<sup>90</sup>See the first article in Thomas Aquinas’ *The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine*. For Aquinas, the purpose of Scripture appears to pertain only to matters of faith, and not to the enterprise of epistemology. He writes, “Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy;” Thomas Aquinas, *The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine* 1.1.

<sup>91</sup>Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 87-88.

<sup>92</sup>K. Scott Oliphint, “The Prolegomena Principle: Frame and Bavinck,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 213.

the mind and still be true to reality? . . . Once that which is universal in the mind is ‘applied’ to individuating matter, it loses its universality such that the nature of Socrates is entirely different from the nature of Plato.”<sup>94</sup>

While it is true that Aquinas believed in the authority of Scripture, he additionally held to the church’s authority as subduing the authority of Scripture. It makes sense that the particulars of Scripture need a universalizing interpreter. Enter the church. Thus, the authority of Scripture became merely functional and no longer ontological. Geiselman notes the shift during the time of the Reformation:

In short, the Council of Trent clearly circumscribed the function of Scripture: it has to serve the Church for the maintenance and confirmation of its kerygma. Though we said above that there was never any preaching without holy Scripture, and cited the example of the original apostolic kerygma, the use of Old Testament prophecy by the apostles had no constitutive significance for their kerygma regarding Jesus the Christ, but only a confirmative one; it only served to support and confirm what the apostles were preaching about Jesus.<sup>95</sup>

### **John Calvin**

Enter Calvin. With varied doctrines swirling regarding Purgatory, praying to the dead, the Sacraments, and indulgences, the question was raised by the Reformers: “Wherein lies authority?” If the church promulgates doctrines that are contradictory to Scripture, how can it be said to be the maiden of Scripture? The answer to this question inevitably leads to the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Mathison sums it up well: “As the voice of almighty God, Scripture carries all of the authority of God himself. That being the case, it is impossible for any man or institution to claim to have an authority of

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 217

equal to or higher than Scripture. That would be equivalent to claiming an authority equal to or greater than that of God himself.”<sup>96</sup>

For Calvin, it was the divine initiative that saved him and it must be the divine initiative that informs the life and practice of the church.<sup>97</sup> Since it is Calvin to whom the explication and defense of Scripture’s *autopistia* is owed during the time of the Reformation, he will be the theologian solely looked at for this period. As Renwick says: “Calvin did more than any other man of his epoch to clarify the thought of the Reformed Church as to the authority of the Scriptures, and his influence greatly affected the Confessions drawn up by the various Churches which professed his faith in different countries.”<sup>98</sup>

**Man’s weakness: blinded eyes to the blinding light.** It is a substantive shift away from Rome found in Calvin’s anthropology that would inform his theological method and use of the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium Spiritu sancti*. As Horton explains,

Calvin’s view differs from the Roman Catholic view concerning the status of the receiver of general revelation. If there had been no Fall, there would be no conflict between faith and reason, obedience to God’s Word and sense-experience, revelation and science. It is not *reason* that is opposed to faith, but the *reasoner*. Clearly, then, the problem is not with general revelation but with the moral condition of its interpreter.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Geiselmann, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 33.

<sup>96</sup>Keith A. Mathison, “*Sola Scriptura*” in *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology; Essays in Honor of R. C. Sproul*, ed. R. C. Sproul, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 47.

<sup>97</sup>See Timothy George, “Introduction,” in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 18-20; Horton, “Knowing God,” 3, 5.

<sup>98</sup>Renwick, *The Authority of the Bible*, 121.

<sup>99</sup>Horton, “Knowing God,” 8; emphasis original.

So Calvin,

It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured.<sup>100</sup>

Again, “We seem to ourselves endowed with the strongest and keenest sight; yet when we look up to the sun and gaze straight at it, that power of sight which was particularly strong on earth is at once blunted and confused by a great brilliance, and thus we are compelled to admit that our keenness in looking upon things earthly is sheer dullness when it comes to the sun.”<sup>101</sup> The only way for man to exit the darkness and understand his plight aright is by contemplation of the Divine—and how he has revealed himself in his written word. He writes, “However the knowledge of God and of ourselves may be mutually connected, the order of right teaching requires that we discuss the former first, then proceed afterward to treat the latter.”<sup>102</sup>

Since man has been created by God, he is required to submit to his authority without balking. “It now assuredly follows that your life is wickedly corrupt unless it be disposed to his service, seeing that his will ought for us to be the law by which we live. Again, you cannot behold him clearly unless you acknowledge him to be the fountainhead and source of every good. From this too would arise the desire to cleave to

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<sup>100</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 1.1.2.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 1.1.2.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

him and trust in him, but for the fact that man's depravity seduces his mind from rightly seeking him."<sup>103</sup> Relating to God is covenantal in nature.

*Knowledge of God is never neutral.* Once you acknowledge him, you must obey him. This knowledge of him begins by inquiry into his revelation in history as found in the Bible. He writes,

The blindness under which [men] labor is almost always mixed with proud vanity and obstinacy. Indeed, vanity joined with men do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation; thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty speculations. They do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption. When this gulf opens, in whatever direction they move their feet, they cannot but plunge headlong into ruin. . . . For they are worshipping not God but a figment and a dream of their own heart.<sup>104</sup>

Following Paul's lead in Romans 1, Calvin comments on the obvious glory that is seen in Creation. Men are without excuse for their revelry. "From this it follows that their stupidity is not excusable, since it is caused not only by vain curiosity but by an inordinate desire to know more than is fitting, joined with a false confidence."<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, "All who set up their own false rites to God worship and adore their own ravings. Unless they had first fashioned a God to match the absurdity of their trifling, they would by no means have dared trifle with God in this way."<sup>106</sup> Men are not innocent. They conjure up false religions so as to appease their conscience, which can see the glory of God in the heavens. "How detestable, I ask you, is this madness: that man, finding God in his body and soul a hundred times, on this very pretense of excellence denies that there

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 1.2.2.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 1.4.1

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

is a God? They will not say it is by chance that they are distinct from brute creatures. Yet they set God aside, the while using ‘nature,’ which for them is the artificer of all things, as a cloak.”<sup>107</sup>

Due to this penchant for self-glorification, man needs more than an objective word outside of him. He needs an internal (subjective) sealing of its truthfulness upon his heart. “Here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely fits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.”<sup>108</sup>

**Scripture: Epistemological authority.** Only through God’s condescension is man able to know him by his works—yet never as he is *en esse* and only *ad extra*.<sup>109</sup> Men are only able to understand God’s works through the lens of God’s interpretation. “It appears that if men were taught only by nature, they would be so tied to confused principles as to worship an unknown god.”<sup>110</sup> God has given men his word to make known the way out of his sinful dispositions and to make himself known.<sup>111</sup> Such a view assumes Augustine’s belief that if there was something hard to understand in Scripture, that the reader should first assume that which is wrong has to do with his understanding or sin clouding his vision. Calvin writes, “All things will tend to this end, that God, the

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 1.4.3.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 1.5.4.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 1.5.9.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.; also Muller, *PRRD*, 1:366.

<sup>110</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 1.5.12.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 1.6.1.

Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture, and that we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths.”<sup>112</sup> Echoes of Augustine again show in Calvin’s writing—a desire to obey precedes the right reading of Scripture. “There also emerges the beginning of true understanding when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself. But not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of obedience.”<sup>113</sup>

**Scripture’s self-witness as man’s surety.** Calvin writes,

As to their question—How can we be assured that [Scripture] has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church?—it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.<sup>114</sup>

His reply,

The highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God’s holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to him.<sup>115</sup>

Calvin’s concern with regard to Scripture’s self-evidencing character is two-fold: the grounding of authority and confidence for the believer. The first piece relates to

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 1.6.1.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 1.6.2.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 1.7.2.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 1.7.4.

the objective nature of Scripture whereas the second treats the subjective rooting that takes place in the heart of the believer.

**Divine lisping: Is accommodation contrary to Scripture's objective**

**nature?** It is clear that Calvin believed the Bible to be the believers' standard of belief. If a doctrine was to be accepted it must be in the Bible. If a man is to have authority, it must stem from rightly understanding and explaining Scripture. Calvin laboriously exegeted verse after verse for his congregation in Geneva, spending incalculable hours getting to the original context and thought of the author. Scripture's authority and normativeness is wholly other and outside the believer.<sup>116</sup> God's representatives stand over, as it were, the listener and dictate what the covenant member is supposed to believe. What Moses, Jesus, and Paul say dictate what the believer does and believes. These spokesmen do not wait to be affirmed before they speak. J. K. S. Reid succinctly teases out three strands of Calvin's thought:

1. "There is an impartation of God Himself to individuals."<sup>117</sup>
2. "An implicit obligation to transmit what is here vouchsafed."<sup>118</sup>
3. "There follows the commission of 'the oracles deposited with the patriarchs' to a written record. The oral transmission is succeeded by a written record."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>See Robert Clyde Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 49.

<sup>117</sup>J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture: A Study of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 43.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.* Reid offers a fourth strand that is highly debatable. Reid says, "Calvin's emphasis and interest is placed, not on the record as such, but on the content of the record [viz., God's Word Incarnate]." *Ibid.*, 43. This, unfortunately, draws a distinction in Calvin's thought that is not there. That is to say, given points 1-3, it appears that the record is just as important as the person giving the message about himself; thus, the need for a vouchsafed, written record of what actually happened.

As Renwick says,

There was no need for Calvin to elaborate his doctrine of Scriptures at length, for its authority was taken for granted by Catholics and Protestants—so much so that the Lutheran Augsburg Confession did not think it necessary to mention the subject. Calvin, however, sought to prove that the authority of the Bible rested on solid ground. The Reformers had shattered the authority of Popes and Councils which formerly had guaranteed the authority of the Scriptures themselves as the very Word of God. Now it was necessary to find other grounds for this faith in the Bible. Calvin saw clearer than most that the Church must have some authority to appeal to unless disorder and chaos are to prevail and the faith of men is to be shattered. *Hence he strove to prove that in the Bible we have the final court of appeal in all matters of doctrine and Christian practice, the very voice of God speaking to His people.*<sup>120</sup>

How can believers have a sure authority upon which to base their faith? Should they just listen to the pioneers of the Christian faith because they were the first ones to write? The commissioning of the disciples to write their testimonies about Jesus, with the assurance of reliability (John 15:26-27; 16:12-15), is dependent on the reliability of the coming Spirit. He will guide them into all truth. The imprint of the divine is all over the testimonies about Jesus.

Man needs a standard that stands outside of himself. “One ought to be able to come to faith on the basis of a simple demonstration of the word, but one’s blindness and perverseness obstruct it. Man is too much given to error; he is so dull that he could never see it by himself.”<sup>121</sup> Given the Fall, man is in need of an objective surety upon which his faith can stand. The testimony is beyond doubt. Yet in the same way that man perverts the perspicuity of heavens’ declaration, he is obtuse to the clear voice of God in the text

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<sup>120</sup>Renwick, “The Authority of the Bible,” 121-22; emphasis added.

<sup>121</sup>H. Jackson Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin’s Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford, 1962), 17. See also Luke Anderson, “The *Imago Dei* Theme in John Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux,” in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. Wilhelm Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 178-98.

of Scripture. Van den Belt is, again, extremely helpful in summarizing and worth quoting at length:

In the first place, Calvin uses ἀυτόπιστος as an adjective for *scriptura*, placing Scripture alongside the *principia* of science. . . . Secondly, the use of ἀυτόπιστος implies that Scripture is not subjected to rational demonstration and thus that *neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici* is an explanation of the Greek term. . . . Thirdly, the contrast between ἀυτόπιστος and the *testimonium* indicated by the *quidem ... tamen* construction, can very well be explained by the tension between the indemonstrable character of Scripture (convincing according to itself, καθ' αὐτὸ πιστὸν) and the fact that it is not accepted by all. The authority of Scripture is indemonstrable still it only receives faith through the *testimonium*. Scripture is ἀυτόπιστος; still it is only through the Spirit that this can be recognized. The fact that Scripture is the final authority in which believers find rest does not make the testimony of the Spirit superfluous. The *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit ought to be kept close together. The Spirit as a teacher shows the self-convincing character of Scripture to believers, just like a philosopher explains the axioms to his pupil; explanation is not the same as demonstration. In the fourth place, although Scripture is ἀυτόπιστος it still must be believed. It is convincing in itself and at the same time it must be accepted as ἀυτόπιστος; the trust of Scripture demands trust.<sup>122</sup>

Scripture is self-evident and stands outside of man's fallen subjectivity.<sup>123</sup> The theology underpinning the obviate nature of Scripture is "the human predicament presumes a fundamental seed of religion (*semen religionis*) in all people, a universal sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatus*), and an innate function of conscience that can, at least, serve to condemn the most sinful pagan. . . . He assumes the existence of natural revelation which *in se* is a true knowledge of God."<sup>124</sup> Calvin is merely following Paul's assumption in Romans 1 where men deny the existence of their Maker (evidenced in Creation) and need

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<sup>122</sup>Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 83-84.

<sup>123</sup>See Robert Reymond, "Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture (1.6-10)," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 44-64; esp. 51.

<sup>124</sup>Muller, *PRRD* 1:273-74.

salvation (evidenced in Scripture).<sup>125</sup> He writes, “There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare his wonderful wisdom; not only more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them.”<sup>126</sup>

In the same way that someone can answer questions about himself without an appeal to an outside authority, so also is God able to testify to himself without an outside witness—since he has given sufficient testimony in nature and in Scripture.<sup>127</sup> “The problem is that sin distorts perception and superstition undermines all right knowledge”<sup>128</sup> and is in need of the spectacles of Scripture to interpret the world. In this way, Scripture is foundational to man’s epistemological certitude as he interprets the nature and the world.<sup>129</sup> Calvin writes, “As rashness and superficiality are joined to ignorance and darkness, scarcely a person has ever been found who did not fashion for himself an idol or specter in place of God.”<sup>130</sup> In both of God’s texts, the Spirit of God is

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<sup>125</sup>Donald Macleod, “Bavinck’s *Prolegomena*: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til,” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 265.

<sup>126</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 1.5.2.

<sup>127</sup>Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 99; also Reymond, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture,” 51n5; 1 Cor 2:11.

<sup>128</sup>Muller, *PRRD* 1:274.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:276.

<sup>130</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 1.5.12; also *ibid.*, 1.5.13-15.

needed to lift the veil of unbelief. The reception of revelation as being from God is dependent on the same Holy Spirit who inspired it.<sup>131</sup>

***Testimonium Spiritu Sancti: Subjective nature.*** Although the objective aspect of Scripture's self-attesting authority is foundational to the believer's reason for the hope that is within him, it is the application wrought by the work of the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to stand in the midst of skeptics. Calvin says, "For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony by the Holy Spirit."<sup>132</sup> It is one thing to know that Jesus is King of kings. It is quite another to place oneself willingly under his rule and authority.<sup>133</sup> With regard to the *testimonium*, "it is easier to state what Calvin says about the internal witness of the Holy Spirit than to know exactly what he has in mind."<sup>134</sup> "For Calvin, authority lies in something being confirmed as authoritative in the heart of the individual. . . . The mind cannot give certainty, Calvin says, because its knowledge always comes through the senses and is therefore subject to doubt. The will can give no certainty and assurance for Calvin."<sup>135</sup> Elias Dantes has said it aptly:

Human beings can live before the face of God only on the condition that they receive grace. Because they are sinners, they need the salvation worked out by God in history and its application to them through the work of the Holy Spirit. . . . Birth and rebirth. Both are the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Just as nothing

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 1.5.16, 18-19.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 1.7.4.

<sup>133</sup>See Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 33.

<sup>134</sup>Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, 45.

<sup>135</sup>James Jones, *The Spirit and the World* (New York: Hawthorn, 1975), 131. See Calvin *Institutes* 1.8.1.

can live biologically apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, so no human being can come alive to God apart from the Spirit's work.<sup>136</sup>

Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit's sealing and confirming has been the subject of much study. It is precisely here that many get him wrong. That is, they have taken Calvin's teaching on the *testimonium* as though it is the only thing necessary to understand Calvin's doctrine of certitude and authority. Edward Dowey Jr. writes,

Calvin does not accept the Bible as revelation, because it has somehow objectively been proved to be inspired. On the contrary, he finds the Bible to be a revelation of God, then he makes the corollary assertion that its writers were inspired, as they asserted, by God. "Corollary assertion" is not an exact term here, because it denotes subsequence and inference. This corollary is neither subsequential nor inferential. It refers to a prior event, which is a presupposition of the revelation, and it is said simultaneously when one speaks of revelation.<sup>137</sup>

God's people, born by the Spirit, come to the Scripture's already affirming its divine nature. In this way, the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to give new eyes and to affirm Scripture's authority and to place confidence in God's revealed word.

The testimony of the Spirit enables the foundations of faith to be placed upon God and not upon human councils and cavils.<sup>138</sup> The relationship between the objective inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the subjective *fiducia* made possible by the conversion of the Holy Spirit is seen clearly in Calvin's first sermon of Pentecost. He writes,

True it is that God stamps it on the heart of every believer by His Holy Spirit, and that is also why He is named the Seal of the Gospel. But those who were to proclaim this teaching through all the world must have been sealed in the first place, and God must have governed them in such a way that now we are assured in full certainty of the teaching which they have published to us, that we do not receive it from them as from mortal creatures, but that God is the real author of it. For we know that our

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<sup>136</sup>Dantes, "Calvin, the Theologian of the Holy Spirit," 134.

<sup>137</sup>Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 90.

<sup>138</sup>So also Hunt, "Bavinck and the Princetonians."

faith would have too weak a foundation if we had only the authority of men. We would be, then, always shaky unless our spirits were raised above the world and were founded in God, knowing that it is from Him that this Word of salvation has proceeded which is daily preached to us.<sup>139</sup>

To depend upon the magisterium to authorize the words of the prophets and apostles is to subvert Paul's argument that the prophets and apostles are the foundation of faith. How are men to know that these words are actually from God? This requires a divine sealing and convincing that cannot be changed.<sup>140</sup>

Was the authority of the church necessary to certify the authority of the Bible?

Johnson responds,

[It] was the first dogma that had to be undermined if the way were to be prepared for a reformed faith; and it was Calvin's concern to discredit this assumption which led him to place so heavy an emphasis upon the noetic office of the Spirit as 'author' of the Scriptures. This was the context of his contention that the Bible is *autopistia*, so that here 'self-authenticating' basically means not requiring authentication by the church.<sup>141</sup>

This balance between the objective and subjective nature of Scripture is crucial in understanding the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Since the Bible is self-authenticating, it is God's Word, whether the Spirit applies its truth to the conscience of the reader or not.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 243.

<sup>140</sup>The issue of subjectivity naturally comes up, yet a mere subjectivism is safeguarded by both Calvin's pneumatology and ecclesiology—neither of which can be dealt with sufficiently in this work. Both of these issues will be touched on in the following chapter.

<sup>141</sup>Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology*, 51.

<sup>142</sup>This is a key distinction between Calvin and Barth, for example. Barth laid a heavier emphasis on the Spirit's coercion. G. W. Bromiley's assessment is scathing and a warning: "The Bible is only inspired as the Holy Spirit applies it and lights it up to the individual soul. Inspiration is confused with illumination, and if this teaching, which has, of course, a very real truth behind it, is pressed, it means that the Bible has no divine content except when the Holy Spirit speaks through it to the individual man. Revelation in the Bible becomes then an act of God, God's revealing of Himself, rather than the product of

## Post-Reformation and the Protestant Scholastics

### John Owen

Calvin provided a polemic against the Roman Catholic Church and challenged its assumptions to preeminence by building the foundation of his theological method upon the prophets and apostles (i.e., Scripture), and not the dictums of the fathers.<sup>143</sup> Puritan John Owen gave considerable attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the self-authenticating Scriptures and his sealing its veracity upon the hearts of believers in the high orthodox period.<sup>144</sup> Owen is a good test-case to consider given his “broad, international scale” and influence that remained “throughout late orthodoxy.”<sup>145</sup> In light of Calvin, who emphasized the objective (as pertains to Scripture) and the subjective (as pertains to the heart of the believer) work of the Spirit, Owen follows this train of thought extensively in two of his works: *Of the Divine Original of the Scripture* and *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit—Continued*. The former is a more robust treatment of the relationship between Scripture, the Spirit, and the believer whereas the latter references the former in light of a lengthy discussion on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

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a divine act, a given revelation.” (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Authority of the Bible: The Attitude of Modern Theologians,” *EvQ* 19 [1947]: 135.)

<sup>143</sup>*Sola Scriptura* should not be understood as *solo Scriptura*. Trueman explains, “The magisterial Reformers maintained a high respect for those theological traditions that were closely tied to the text of scripture and to the exegesis of the same; what they rejected was the independent and definitive authority of the institutional church as providing a second, parallel line of authoritative teaching. The notion of *sola scriptura*, scripture alone, was something which accentuated scripture as the ultimate normative authority by which all theological formulations were to be judged; it was not something which meant that Christianity had to be reinvented every Sunday, or which claimed that scripture could ever be read in a vacuum.” (Carl Trueman, “Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology: Historical Prolegomena,” in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology*, ed. Neil B. MacDonald and Carl Trueman [Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2008], 5.)

<sup>144</sup>Muller, *PRRD* 1:32. John Owen has been selected out of so many other Puritans because of his extended treatment of Scripture’s self-witness.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.* 1:28; see also 1:66-67, 79-80.

**God and his self-revelation to the world.** Before beginning a brief overview of Owen’s *method* in showing Scripture’s divine origin, it is beneficial to show that Owen believed that the very *nature* of Scripture was divine. Owen believes that “the nature and being of God is the foundation of all true religion.”<sup>146</sup> Theology is possible because of who God is in himself (aseity)—“infinitely glorious, good, wise, holy, powerful, righteous, self-subsisting, self-sufficient, all-sufficient Being, the fountain, cause, and author of life and being to all things.”<sup>147</sup> God is utterly transcendent, yet graciously immanent. “And this God instructs us in, in all those places where he proclaims his name and describes his eternal *excellencies*, and that either absolutely or in comparison with other things. . . . The revelation that God is pleased to make of himself unto us gives the rule and measure of all religious worship and obedience.”<sup>148</sup> We only know this transcendent God as he has revealed himself in Scripture, through his Spirit’s inspiration of the Scripture’s authors.

He writes in his *Theologoumena*, “Whether one considers the origin of theology, or the subject, or the goal, or the manner of stating and teaching, or indeed the entire nature or practice, it appears that [theology] can in no way be counted among the human sciences, either speculative or practical, nor should [theology] be bound to their rules or methods.”<sup>149</sup> Owen begins his treatise by saying: “That the whole authority of the

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<sup>146</sup>John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 3 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), 64.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup>John Owen, *Theologoumena of The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 17 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994) 1.2.2.

Scripture in itself depends solely upon its divine original, is confessed by all who acknowledge its authority. The evincing and declaration of that authority being the thing at present aimed at, the discovery of its divine spring and rise is, in the first place, necessarily to be premised thereunto”<sup>150</sup> Owen then launches into his exposition in paraphrase with the first words of Hebrews 1:1: *πάλαι ὁ θεὸς. . . ἐν τοῖς προφήταις.* This is followed by systematically working through the assumption and doctrine that God spoke by the prophets in the OT and the apostles in the NT.<sup>151</sup>

In the second chapter in *Of the Divine Originals*, Owen says that man must receive the Scriptures based upon their divine authorship—not how he receive other writings—with “divine and supernatural faith.”<sup>152</sup> Why must someone believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God? “The formal reason of things being but one. . . . The authority of God, the supreme Lord of all, the first and only absolute Truth, whose word is truth—speaking in and by the penmen of the Scriptures—evinced singly in and by the Scripture itself—is the sole bottom and foundation, or formal reason, of our assenting to those Scriptures as his word.”<sup>153</sup> With regard to the penmen of Scripture knowing that it was God that they were hearing, Owen says that “his voice to them was accompanied

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<sup>150</sup>Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 297.

<sup>151</sup>It is well-known fact that Owen spent considerable time defending the reliability of the actual text of Scripture. He wrote treatises *Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text* and *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes Adversus Fanaticos*. The former went so far as to defend the originality of the Hebrew points. Thus, Owen is not slack in defending the actual text of Scripture. The treatise under consideration here, however, deals with the overarching principle of divine inspiration and, what will be looked at in the following chapter, a historical-narrative theological method.

<sup>152</sup>Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 306.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*, 307.

with its own evidence, which gave assurance unto them.”<sup>154</sup> In other words, the transcendent God condescended and spoke intelligible, true words to his penman. Those that inscripturated his words did not merely write what they interpreted of the facts of history. Indeed, they were given God’s own thoughts and interpretation of those facts. The Spirit and voice of God communicated actual words and thoughts to the writers, after which time, they committed the words and thoughts to writing.<sup>155</sup> This is not like the post-conservative argument that says later readers imbued the writings with a divine authority for their community.<sup>156</sup> It is not merely a matter of the Spirit appropriating a text. The Spirit was effervescent in the production of the text. The Spirit does not merely enlighten eyes and enflame hearts of the hearers when they hear the words of Paul and Peter. The Spirit enlightened the eyes and enflamed the hearts by carrying them along in his very own interpretation (2 Pet 1:13, 17-18, 21).

How does Owen go about proving the assurance given to the writers and the hearers, that these words are God’s words? He succumbs to outside criteria—namely, that the scriptures “sufficiently manifest themselves” in how well they fit together.<sup>157</sup> In other

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Use of the word “communicated” is intentionally ambiguous, as the process of inspiration is a mystery. That is, *how* the *notitia* were imparted to the authors is mysterious. At times, YHWH spoke directly and expected all the words to be repeated in the hearing of the people (as in the case of Moses). Other times, YHWH left particular words of a message to the interpretation and glossary available to the prophet (as in the case of Jeremiah in Jer 1:11, 13; 24:3; Amos in Amos 7:8; 8:2; Zechariah in Zech 4:2; 5:2). Other writings are the grief-inspired incantations of the prophet (i.e., David, Jeremiah, Micah, Malachi). Other times men’s lives serve as extended metaphors to convey meaning to God’s covenant people (i.e., Hosea).

<sup>156</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context,” *Didaskalia* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 10; idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 125; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 114-15.

<sup>157</sup>Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 307.

words, the next question posed by the skeptic is: “How do you know that its mere claim to be the Word of God is correct?” Owen seems to answer with an *a posteriori* argument so that men can trust what is written therein because it manifests itself—by its majesty, coherency, etc.<sup>158</sup> He does not appeal to Scripture’s testimony to claim its authority.

In order not to fall subject to the plasticity of Scripture’s proofs, Owen buttresses his argument from its majesty, etc. Questioned as to whether Scripture has authority with respect to the reader (*quoad nos*), he says that “authority is a thing that no person or thing can have in him or itself, that hath it not in respect of *others*.”<sup>159</sup> In this way Owen introduces the subjective element seen in Calvin’s *testimonium* so that all who are the recipients of divine communication come under its authority. A king without subjects has no authority.<sup>160</sup> The chapters that follow in Owen’s work provide contours as to what he means.

**Scripture’s self-witness as faith’s ground.** In chapters three and four, which pertain directly to the argument of this dissertation, Owen states that there are two forms of argumentation: “inartificial, by the way of testimony; and artificial, by the way of deductions and inferences.”<sup>161</sup> In both ways the Scripture is used; yet the latter is dependent upon the admissibility of the former. That is, if the testimony is false, then the deductions must also be false—and the negative also holds (if the witnesses are true, then

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<sup>158</sup>This is further evidenced where Owen attempts to navigate the waters of competing religions (see Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 325).

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 308; emphasis original.

<sup>160</sup>This introduces a discussion between a *de jure* and *de facto* authority—which is fascinating and worthy of mention, but will only be dealt with tangentially in the following chapter.

<sup>161</sup>*Ibid.*, 313.

the inferences from their testimony must also be true).<sup>162</sup> Owen presses the issue: “What doth [this law and testimony] urge for its acceptance? Tradition, authority of the church, miracles, consent of men? or doth it speak αὐτοκρατορικῶς and stand only upon its sovereignty?”<sup>163</sup> The answer proffered: The θεὸπνευστος of Scripture is “its plea for reception.”<sup>164</sup> To reject this claim is to place oneself in the camp of those who did not believe the prophets when they spoke (see Matt 5:12; 23:29; Luke 11:47-48; Acts 7:52; 2 Pet 2:1; Jer 23). Even more, considering that Satan can “cause a voice to be heard in the air, and so deceive us,”<sup>165</sup> God has ordained that his word be written down to make it that much surer. In this way, Jesus can assure us that the written word is even better than the resurrection of a witness (Luke 16:31). This marriage between the Spirit and Scripture runs contrary to how post-conservatives have painted the Protestant Scholastics.<sup>166</sup>

So then the answer as to why Owen receives it comes to the issue of the Holy Spirit. He says, “We do so receive, embrace, believe, and submit unto it, because of the authority of God who speaks it, or gave it forth as his mind and will, evidencing itself by the Spirit in and with that Word unto our minds and consciences.”<sup>167</sup> Owen is able to rest

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<sup>162</sup>This dependence upon the testimony of the witnesses holds greater sway than the majesty, coherence, prophetic foretelling, commonness of the language. As will be seen in the concluding chapter, the narrative of Scripture itself demands the reader to trust the witnesses to the truth.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 315.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>By way of reminder from chap. 2, Grenz writes, “Transformed in this manner into a book of doctrine, the Bible is easily robbed of its dynamic character. Separating the doctrine of Scripture from its natural embedding in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit conceptually separates Scripture from the Spirit, whose vehicle of operation it is. And treating revelation and Scripture as prolegomenon can easily result in a static understanding of the relationship between the two.” Grenz, *Revisioning*, 114.

<sup>167</sup>Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 318-19.

his authority on the *text* of Scripture because of his conviction that God stands behind the text of Scripture as its author—not merely as an inspiring affirmation of its contents by human authors. In other words, Scripture and its Author are not at odds with each other. Rather, man comes to know God peculiarly through his written word. It is self-evidentiary. Scripture witnesses to its own divine origin. In an effort to explain in common experience what other things may be known from their self-evidence, Owen offers two: light and power. “Light manifests itself. . . . Doth it not evince itself with an assurance above all that can be obtained by any testimony whatever.”<sup>168</sup> The church’s role is merely confirmatory. “A church may *bear up the light*—it is *not the light*. It bears witness to it, but kindles not one divine beam to further its discovery.”<sup>169</sup>

Why is it that men demand evidences not found in Scripture, which *is* self-evident? It is like someone looking at the light and demanding, “Prove that it is the light.” Owen responds that it is not due to insufficiency in the light:

There is, in the dispensation of the Word, an evidence of truth commending itself to the consciences of men. Some receive not this evidence. Is it for want of light in the truth itself? No; that is a glorious light that shines into the hearts of men. Is it for want of testimony to assert his light? No; but merely because the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of men, that they should not behold it. . . . The Word, then, makes a sufficient proposition of itself, wherever it is; and he to whom it shall come, who refuses it because it comes not so or so testified, will give an account of his atheism and infidelity. He that hath the witness of God need not stay for the witness of men, for the witness of God is greater.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 321; emphasis original.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 322.

The light and power evinced by Scripture are not to be confused with fanaticism.<sup>171</sup> He writes, “We plead not for the usefulness, much less the necessity, of any such testimony. Yes, the principles we have laid down—resolving all faith into the public testimony of the Scriptures themselves—do render all such private testimonies altogether needless.”<sup>172</sup> The *testimonium*, then, is a public discourse (the Scripture) that can be tested by all.<sup>173</sup>

By way of summary, it may be easiest to let Owen offer his own as he wrote in *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*.<sup>174</sup> Owen writes,

We believe the Scripture to be the word of God with divine faith for its own sake only; or, our faith is resolved into the authority and truth of God only as revealing himself unto us therein and thereby. And this authority and veracity of God so infallibly manifest or evince themselves unto our faith, or our minds in the exercise of it, by the revelation itself in the Scripture, and no otherwise; or “Thus saith the Lord,” is the reason why we ought to believe, and why we do so, why we believe at all in general, and why we believe any thing in particular. And this we call the formal object or reason of faith.<sup>175</sup>

He concludes,

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<sup>171</sup>This is an issue he treats at length in his *Adversus Fanaticos*, especially chap. 4 where he speaks about the inner light (“*De limine interno*”). He says, “Lumen internum omnibus commune, aliquali principiorum veritatis notitia, et vi conscientiae consistens, *naturale* est, atque ita dicendum; hoc est, naturae humanae a prima creatione *inditum* fuit, atque etiamnum ab ipsis naturae principiis fluit: itaque lumen hoc a Christo non esse mediatore, qua est novi foederis mediator, affirmamus, multo minus esse ipsum Christum.” (John Owen, *Pro Sacris Scripturis Adversus Hujus Temporis Fanaticos Exercitationes Apologeticae Quatuor*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. Thomas Russell, vol. 4 [London: Richard Baynes, 1826], 595.) It is not as though one can claim (like the fanatics Calvin was opposing before) that God spoke by some revelation apart from that he has revealed in the person and work of Christ—who is true light of true light.

<sup>172</sup>Owen, *Of the Divine Originals*, 326.

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>174</sup>John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit—Continued: The Reason of Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995). He alludes to his *Of the Divine Originals* discourse and believes that it “cleared this argument.” He says, “And the reason why I shall be the briefer herein is, because I have long since, in another discourse, cleared this argument, and I shall not here again call over any thing that was delivered therein, because what hath been unto this day gainsaid unto it or excepted against it hath been of little weight of consideration.” Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 70.

If it be asked how I know this Scripture to be a divine revelation, to be the word of God; I answer: 1. I do not know it demonstratively, upon rational, scientific principles, because such a divine revelation is not capable of such a demonstration, 1 Cor. ii.9. 2. I do not assent unto it, or think it to be so, only upon arguments and motives highly probable, or morally uncontrollable, as I am assuredly persuaded of many other things whereof I can have no certain demonstration, 1 Thess. ii.13. 3. *But I believe it so to be with faith divine and supernatural, resting on and resolved into the authority and veracity of God himself, evidencing themselves unto my mind, my soul, and conscience, by this revelation itself, and not otherwise. Here we rest, and deny that we believe the Scripture to be the word of God formally for any other reason but itself, which assureth us of its divine authority.* And if we rest not here, we must run on the rock of a moral certainty only, which shakes the foundation of all divine faith, or fall into the gulf and labyrinth of an endless circle, in proving two things mutually by one another, as the church by the Scripture and the Scripture by the church, in an everlasting rotation. Unless we intend so to wander, we must come to something wherein we may rest for its own sake, and that not with a strong and firm opinion, but with divine faith.<sup>176</sup>

### Modern

Following Calvin's lead in the *autopistia* of the Scriptures and the *testimonium Spiritu sancti* the Reformed tradition sought to employ these two lines of epistemology to its apologetic. During the course of this outworking there arose some very nuanced and foundational presuppositions. Too often these differences caused undue harm by charges being leveled against those within the Reformed camp. Each of these charges essentially denigrated the other by saying that they either did not believe that Scripture was the Word of God or that they did not desire to evangelize the lost. Two thinkers represent, in particular, two branches of Reformed theological epistemology—Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and Herman Bavinck.<sup>177</sup> Subsequently, and in light of post-conservatism's

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.; emphasis added.

<sup>177</sup>The former has been a mainstay of Reformed theology in the United States, whereas Bavinck has gained recent ground recently with the translation and publication of his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

proclivity to separate the two, the following section will look at (1) The nature of Scripture and (2) How one proves Scripture's divine nature.

### **Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield**

Warfield often has been accused of holding to a rigid conception of inspiration.<sup>178</sup> He speaks of theology as a science and lays so much emphasis on the divine authorship of Scripture that, at times, he appears to believe that there is no human agency.<sup>179</sup> Such conceptions unfairly place Warfield in a different context from where he lived.<sup>180</sup> During the time of Warfield's writing, theologians assumed the Bible was merely a human document. The history of religions school (with Rationalism) ruled the theological realm. Warfield sought to correct such misconceptions. Theology, conceived as a science, is not static. Indeed, reflection on God's revelation is progressive.<sup>181</sup> Zaspel summarizes, "There has been an Augustine and an Anselm and a Luther and a Calvin. And we do not expect the history of theology to close in our own day, however complete our body of truth may seem to us. Systematic theology is the study of God's self-revelation, and as any other science, it entails our progressive understanding of it."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>Jack B. Rogers, "Van Til and Warfield on Scripture in the Westminster Confession," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 154; Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 296.

<sup>179</sup>Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 245, 290.

<sup>180</sup>For a historical corrective see Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 111-40.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*

Warfield held to the concurrent theory of inspiration,<sup>183</sup> emphasizing its divine origin.<sup>184</sup> Aware of dictation theory, Warfield placed his theology outside that camp.<sup>185</sup>

When Warfield speaks of the “pure word of God free from all human admixtures”<sup>186</sup> which is “diluted with no human admixture whatever,”<sup>187</sup> he is merely commenting on the impossibility for human agency to detract from God’s word of power and efficacy.<sup>188</sup> He turns the assumptions of his contemporaries on their heads—as they held that Scripture was a human document free from all divine admixtures.<sup>189</sup> As Lane rightly concludes,

Some have sought to do this by abandoning Warfield’s belief in scripture as God’s word: what scripture says, God says. But such attempts will not produce a doctrine which is orthodox. *The way forward is not to weaken Warfield’s firm grasp of the divine authorship of scripture, any more than denial of the deity of Christ is the cure for docetism.* What is needed is not a lessening of our grasp of scripture as God’s word, but a heightening of our grasp of its human authorship.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Hunt, “Bavinck and the Princetonians,” 322.

<sup>184</sup>A. N. S. Lane, “B. B. Warfield on the Humanity of Scripture,” *Vox Evangelica* 16 (1986): 77-79. Contrary, see William J. Abaraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford, 1981), 34; Paul Kjoss Helseth, “Are Postconservative Evangelicals Fundamentalists: Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of NeoFundamentalism,” in *Reclaiming the Center*, ed. Millard Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 232-40.

<sup>185</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 2:628-630; cf. Lane, “B. B. Warfield,” 81.

<sup>186</sup>Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 64.

<sup>187</sup>Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1954), 63.

<sup>188</sup>Paul Kjoss Helseth, “*Right Reason*” and the Princeton Mind: *An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 56-103; B. B. Warfield, “Looking to Men,” in *Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 98-99; idem, “God and Human Religion and Morals,” in *Shorter Writings*, 1:42.

<sup>189</sup>See Lane, “B. B. Warfield,” 87.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, 90; emphasis added.

**God's self-revelation in the world.** Warfield writes, "The principle of authority is inherent in the very idea of a revelation."<sup>191</sup> Warfield cited two classes for how Scripture speaks of itself as God's speech: the first is "God, as recorded in Scripture, said" (Gen 12:1-3; Rom 9:17; Exod 9:16; Gal 3:8); and the second class being "Scripture, the Word of God, says" (Gen 2:24; Deut 32:43; Pss 2:1; 16:10; 45:7; 95:7; 102:26; 104:4; Isa 55:3; Matt 19:4-5; Acts 4:24-25; 13:34-35; Heb 3:7).<sup>192</sup> From the second class, he concludes,

This emphasis on the *written* Scriptures as themselves the product of a divine activity, making them as such the divine voice to us, is characteristic of the whole treatment of Scripture by Paul . . . and it is thoroughly accordant with the point of view so exhibited, that he explicitly declares, not of the writers of Scripture, but of the sacred writings themselves, that they are theopneustic—breathed out, or breathed into by God (II Tim. iii. 16). For he applies this epithet not to "every prophet," but to "every *Scripture*."<sup>193</sup>

He concludes, "The force of their conception of the Scriptures as an oracular book, it was all one to the New Testament writers whether they said, 'God says' or 'Scripture says.' This is made very clear, as their real standpoint, by their double identification of Scripture with God and God with Scripture."<sup>194</sup> "Natural, religious sentiment" is a gift from God and part and parcel of who man is—created *imago Dei*—but "it is not an

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<sup>191</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 1: 31.

<sup>192</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 299-300.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>194</sup>*Ibid.*, 348.

adequate religion for sinners.”<sup>195</sup> God’s speech is necessary for man to know how he may be redeemed. Indeed, it tells men that they must be redeemed.

**Warfield, Bavinck, and Scripture as theology’s ground.** Jason Hunt shows that the difference between the Princetonians and Amsterdam (*viz.* Bavinck) is one of polemic and not of substance. Those who seek to show the two Reformed traditions disagreed on Scripture as the starting point for theology, have misread them. Hunt distills the issue, “Warfield was chiefly concerned with reason being discarded and replaced with faith (i.e. an irrational faith).”<sup>196</sup> Faith is rational. It is not base fideism—throwing reason out the window. Again, “Warfield’s concern [is] to establish the truth of the Bible and its inspiration in the trustworthiness of the human authors and related historical facts.”<sup>197</sup>

If Hunt is right in his assessment, then, the lines of demarcation (one of emphasis) between Princeton and Amsterdam should be drawn at apologetic and theological methodology, respectively. Failure to do this causes one author to believe that Warfield binds

together one of the permanent contributions of Calvin to theology, the doctrine of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, with one of the most impermanent elements of his system, the rational proofs of Scripture. It is precisely Calvin’s refusal to do this, even in a century when his indicia were less dubious than they are today and though he considered them so cogent that with them an unskilled arguer could defeat all opposition—that marks his theological genius.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup>Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 106-07.

<sup>196</sup>Hunt, “Bavinck and the Princetonians,” 331.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid. Also John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 134-35, 137-38.

<sup>198</sup>Dowey, *The Knowledge of God*, 116. For opposing view see Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 195-96.

Both Princeton and Amsterdam held to the preeminence of Scripture's self-attesting authority, principally. Methodologically, however, Warfield's *prolegomena* was very different from Bavinck. While Warfield believed that Scripture was the inerrant Word of God, written, he did not "engage in an all-out war"<sup>199</sup> on the presuppositions of the world. That is, he failed to challenge the unbeliever's ground for knowledge. As Van Til challenges,

The real issue is whether God exists as self-contained, whether therefore the world runs according to his plan, and whether God has confronted those who would frustrate the realization of that plan with a self-contained interpretation of that plan. . . . The self-contained circle of the ontological trinity is not broken up by the fact that there is an economical relation of this triune God with respect to man. No more is the self-contained character of Scripture broken up by the fact that there is an economy of transmission and acceptance of the word of God it contains. Such at least is, or ought to be, the contention of Christians if they would really challenge the modern principle.<sup>200</sup>

Instead of an all-out war on the non-believer's presuppositions, Warfield sought to *show* the rationality of the Christian Scripture. In this way, methodologically, he appealed to the *a posteriori* to show the viability of the Bible (an apologetic purpose).<sup>201</sup> He succumbed to "maintaining a measure of autonomy for man" (or a "theology of experience"), thereby "weakening [his] own defense of the infallible

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<sup>199</sup>Cornelius Van Til, introduction to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 23.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.

<sup>201</sup>Hunt, "Bavinck and the Princetonians," 331-33. See Warfield, *Works*, 9:25-41. Warfield writes, "How shall we so firmly brace ourselves that, as the flood of the world's thought beats upon us, it may bring us cleansing and refreshment, but may not sweep us away from our grasp on Christian truth? . . . This nature and measure of the supernatural we have all the evidence which gives us Christianity. And surely the mass of that evidence is far too great to be shaken by any current of the world's thought whatever." Ibid., 31. The evidence he refers to is natural revelation.

Bible.”<sup>202</sup> Bavinck, however, began his *prolegomena* from the Christian Scriptures. Bavinck’s *principia* were Scripture. As a result, he is more explicit in his defense of Scripture’s *autopistia*.

Paul Kjos Helseth’s extensive treatment of Princeton’s theology is helpful in showing how Grenz and Franke reinterpret the facts of history. While repudiation of bald propositionalism in evangelicalism is fine,<sup>203</sup> this classic foundationalist understanding of theology “cannot be justified by appealing to the naive rationalism of Old Princeton, simply because the Princeton theologians were not naive rationalists.”<sup>204</sup> Helseth continues,

While they certainly were the methodological disciples of Francis Turretin and consequently conceived of theology as that “science” having to do with God, nevertheless they were not beholden for the epistemology either to the humanism of the scholastic tradition or to the rationalism of the Enlightenment in a formative sense. For not only did they recognize that objective as well as subjective factors are of critical importance to the life of the mind, but they also based their theology on that combination of head and heart, of “cognitive-doctrinal” and practical-experiential” factors that postconservatives themselves insist is of defining significance to the mainstream of the evangelical tradition.<sup>205</sup>

In other words, post-conservatives have misinterpreted Old Princeton—as well as those who follow in its methodological wake. “Old Princeton’s emphasis on “right reason” and the primacy of the intellect in faith is not evidence that the Princeton theologians were covert—if not overt—rationalists, and the purveyors of a theology that was scholasticized

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<sup>202</sup>Van Til, Introduction to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 67.

<sup>203</sup>This is questionable given the straw man of classic foundationalism Grenz and Franke erect in the name of modern evangelicalism, but, for the sake of argument, the point is conceded.

<sup>204</sup>Helseth, “*Right Reason*,” 145.

<sup>205</sup>*Ibid.*, 145-46.

by an “alien philosophy”. . . . It is evidence, rather, that they stood in the epistemological mainstream of the evangelical tradition.”<sup>206</sup>

**Princeton’s application of theological method.** Helseth attempts to show the erroneous interpretation of Old Princeton by post-conservatives by showing that their fountainhead is the Rogers-McKim thesis.<sup>207</sup> Helseth cites Peter Hicks’ work on Charles Hodge<sup>208</sup> as an obscure, but “important piece of scholarship that challenges the assumptions behind” the Rogers-McKim proposal as it evaluates three lacunae in their proposal, primary of which is “the degree to which Hodge may be characterized properly as a rationalist.”<sup>209</sup> By way of summary,

If Hodge’s emphasis on the unitary operation of the soul suggests that cognition is an activity involving both the intellect and the will, it also suggests that it is a moral rather than a merely rational enterprise. It also suggests that the extent to which truth is apprehended by the mind and then followed in life is ultimately determined not by the rational power of the intellect alone, but by the moral character of the knowing agent.<sup>210</sup>

In this way, then, post-conservatives’ broad strokes of Old Princeton’s theological method as being that of rationalism, apart from piety, is erroneous. Further, evangelicalism has followed the approach of Old Princeton, not as a bald rationalism, but as a conception of how to understand God and his Word with the heart and the mind.

Affirming Scripture as the beginning place of theology is not to make reason preeminent.

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>207</sup>Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.

<sup>208</sup>Peter Hicks, *The Philosophy of Charles Hodge: A 19<sup>th</sup> Century Approach to Reason, Knowledge and Truth* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997).

<sup>209</sup>Helseth, “*Right Reason*,” 150n45. I commend both Hicks’s and Helseth’s work for further study. For the purposes of this dissertation, they cannot be summarized and analyzed effectively.

Piety and reason are extensively interdependent in Scripture. Thus, theology will hold to both (as Scripture holds these two in tandem and is theology's birthplace).

Concluding his chapter, in which he evaluates post-conservatism's misinterpretation of Old Princeton, Helseth questions the viability of cross-cultural truth claims in a post-conservative schema. Or, to put it another way, how can Christ have preeminence in the world when his authority is granted within a culturally-bound framework? He writes,

How can such claims [for Christianity's primacy in explaining the human experience] be anything more than blatantly chauvinistic when they are grounded in utterances that can only be subjectively true? Although Grenz and [Robert] Webber and their postconservative colleagues might imagine that the "explicative power" of the Christian faith surpasses that of other religious traditions, thinkers from other religious traditions—who are similarly convinced of the "explicative power" of the own "interpretive frameworks"—will certainly want to know why this contention is justified.<sup>211</sup>

How can Christianity adjudicate truth to the world, if it is merely one expression from one framework in a host of competing worldviews? Helseth's contention is that it cannot.<sup>212</sup>

### **Herman Bavinck**

Bavinck is a more consistent model for the application of Calvin's doctrine of *autopistia* than that of Warfield, since he applies Scripture's self-witness more consistently both methodologically and apologetically. Bavinck writes that any knowledge man may gain about God must originate in God's own self-knowledge. "He

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 153-54.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 174.

is, in the absolute sense of the term, the source, the primary efficient cause of our knowledge of him, for he is absolutely free, self-conscious, and true. His self-knowledge and self-consciousness is the source (*principium essendi*) of our knowledge of him.”<sup>213</sup> Again, “The fact that theology exists we owe solely to God, to his self-consciousness, to his good pleasure.”<sup>214</sup> God’s self-revelation is the only way for man to know God, therefore any speech about God must begin with God’s own revelation—Scripture. “The self-revelation of God can . . . be the only *principium cognoscendi* of our knowledge of God.”<sup>215</sup> In this way, Bavinck helpfully delineates three *principia*: *principia essendi* (God’s self-knowledge; theology’s source); *principia cognoscendi externum* (God’s self-revelation as recorded in Scripture); and *principia cognoscendi internum* (the “illumination of human beings by God’s Spirit”).<sup>216</sup>

**The Spirit’s Scripture as theology’s ground.** Van den Belt writes,

For Bavinck the *testimonium* “is not a source of knowledge and it is not the ground of faith.” Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi externum* remains the only source and the final basis of faith. Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος* and therefore the ground of faith; a deeper ground cannot be given. The Spirit creates a capacity in the heart of the Christian that corresponds to this self-convincing revelation. This capacity makes the Christian sensible to the *testimonium* through which the Spirit of God witnesses inwardly to the truth of God that is revealed in Scripture.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>See also Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

<sup>213</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 212.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid.

<sup>217</sup>Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 282.

Thus, the *testimonium* serves to give confidence to the believer that this self-authenticating Word is from God.<sup>218</sup>

Bavinck places Scripture under the broader umbrella of God's self-revelation, alongside theophany, prophecy, miracles, and Creation. Scripture is added to general revelation after the Fall in order to bring salvation to people. Bavinck did not view the *preolegomena* of Scripture as merely cognitive but as integrally tied to the will and piety of the individual (contra post-conservatism's re-casting of historic Protestantism's pursuit of *prolegomena*).<sup>219</sup> Within his discussion, Bavinck helpfully distinguishes between inspiration and illumination—the latter being “the illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit by which human beings believingly accept and understand the revelation of God occurring outside of themselves.”<sup>220</sup> Further, “the objective revelation of God occurring outside of human beings absolutely does not consist solely in acts, in the events of nature and history, but certainly also in words, in the communication of truth.”<sup>221</sup> Therefore, “the activity of the Spirit is continually needed.”<sup>222</sup> In this way, then, the Reformation set up a *qualitative* difference between general and special revelation (rather than a *quantitative* difference purported by Rome).<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Macleod, “Bavinck’s *Prolegomena*,” 261-282.

<sup>219</sup>Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 344.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*, 361.

**The Spirit’s self-witness as objective reality.** One of the charges by Rome against Calvin’s conception of *autopistia* is that it falls into subjectivism. Bavinck addresses this charge by showing that those things people all know, generally speaking (i.e., memories, other minds, law of noncontradiction), they know without appeal to outside sources. They, also, are *autopistia*.<sup>224</sup> Behind Bavinck’s explanation lay a philosophical commitment to Realism. Bolt explains,

It is this natural certainty about the reliability of the sense—“I saw her do it!”—and the reality of the external world that gives the lie to empiricists who claim that scientific, demonstrative certainty is the only certainty that there is. The existence of such indemonstrable self-evident truths cannot, according to philosophic realism, be explained by the rationalist notion of innate ideas either. If the certainty we possess about the *external* world were based on *internal* states of affairs in the knowing subject, then there would still be a fundamental dualism between subject and object. According to Bavinck, the reason that the dualistic theory of innate ideas was rejected by Reformed theologians was their belief that it probably led inevitably to idealism.<sup>225</sup>

Abraham Kuyper also sought to free people from this inherent dualism “which is so often inserted between the two principia of Divine knowledge.”<sup>226</sup> With regards to the *testimonium*, there is no substantive difference between Kuyper and Bavinck.<sup>227</sup> For both the *testimonium* brings sight to the blind to rightly see that which is objectively glorious.<sup>228</sup> Again, we see an *emphasis* rather than a substantial difference between

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 281.

<sup>225</sup>John Bolt, “*Sola Scriptura* as an Evangelical Theological Method?” in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 79.

<sup>226</sup>Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 381-82.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 553-63.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 387.

Amsterdam and Princeton and Geneva.<sup>229</sup> For Kuyper says, “Assurance of faith and demonstration are two entirely heterogeneous things. And he who, in whatever department, still seeks to demonstrate his *principium*, simply shows that he does not know what is to be understood by a *principium*.”<sup>230</sup> This explanation has been accused of succumbing, unnecessarily, to Common Sense Realism by men like K. Scott Oliphint.<sup>231</sup>

Oliphint’s point should not be too readily disregarded, especially in light of apologetic value for the Christian. While Reidian Realism states its apologetic *de facto*, it fails to get underneath the experience that is common to all. The way forward is to begin with Scripture.<sup>232</sup> Unfortunately, Realism places too much credence in sense perception;

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<sup>229</sup>Macleod assesses, “Bavinck argues that if Christian revelation were to submit in advance to the judgment of reason it would contradict itself, since that revelation presupposes the darkness and incompetence of the human intellect. Apologetics, there, cannot precede faith. Nor can it precede dogmatics, either as introduction or as foundation. Instead, it has to assume the truths set forth in dogmatics.” Macleod, “Bavinck’s *Prolegomena*,” 268-269. In this way apologetics is confirmative not normative. That is to say, it is *a posteriori* to dogmatics.

Again, “[Warfield’s proofs] can convince us intellectually that Scripture is the word of God, but they cannot give us “a full persuasion and assurance” of its divine authority. Van Til’s “challenge” can do the same for Christian theism. It can engender respect for it and convince us of its intellectual coherence and force. But it cannot bring men to the knees, confessing, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” Van Til’s apologetic, for all its objective validity, can achieve subjective cogency only through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Here the difference between Amsterdam and Old Princeton becomes minimal. In the last analysis each has to invoke the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*. His reliance on that *testimonium* vindicates Van Til from the charge of fideism; but, equally, it vindicates Warfield from the charge of rationalism” (Ibid., 278.)

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 563.

<sup>231</sup>Oliphint, “The Prolegomena Principle,” 201-32; esp. 211. Oliphint poses five issues that need to be corrected with Bavinck’s method (three of which were mentioned above as they pertain to Thomist philosophy and universals); what he terms “Bavinck’s bug” which will infect the entire doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. The final two (as they pertain to Bavinck’s realism directly) are (4) “Bavinck’s realism is, if not identical with, certainly within the same family of Common Sense Realism.” Ibid., 221. And (5) “One of the key elements in this progression [in which scholarship has divorced itself from Christianity] was the adoption (as well as the consequent failure) in evangelical apologetics of Reid’s Common Sense philosophy. The primary reason for this failure, according to Marsden, was that it was never able to provide a ground or foundation for its most basic principles; it was never able to account for its understanding of “common sense” itself.” Ibid., 223.

<sup>232</sup>Although RE shows the warrant for belief in God, it has to make a Kierkegaardian leap of faith to argue for the *particularity* of the Christian faith. A problem attested to by the likes of Plantinga, Wolterstorff, et al.; see chap. 7 for a corrective.

which, inadvertently, denigrates *sola Scriptura*.<sup>233</sup> The proofs should serve as *confirmation* that the Christian Scripture is true in the face of skepticism, not as *principia*. The *testimonium* of the Holy Spirit serves to free the Christian from both rationalism and fideism.<sup>234</sup> In this way, to ground one's epistemology in Scripture does not preclude interaction and adjudication of non-Christian worldviews. That is, with regard to Marsden's critique above, we cannot merely say that there is innate knowledge whetted by the senses; this makes an assertion without a ground.<sup>235</sup> When we begin with Scripture, we start with the ground and move to the inferences (i.e. rationality, other minds, memories).

### Conclusion

In light of Augustine, Calvin, Owen, and Bavinck we have seen that Scripture is God's Word objectively. Its veracity is believed existentially by the believer as he is illumined by the Spirit who inspired the text. The same Spirit, who carried the prophets of the OT and reminded the apostles of Christ's teaching in the NT, confirms his inspired text in the hearts of hearers. God surely is the ground for authority in Scripture. His divine power and invisible attributes are clearly seen in nature, but suppressed by man. The remedy for such suppression comes through his inscripturated words. Following Warfield, what God says, Scripture says; what Scripture says, God says. This conception

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<sup>233</sup>See Oliphint, "The Prolegomena Principle," where he cites Bolt as claiming that *sola Scriptura* is not sufficient to defend Christianity. Bear in mind, both Bavinck and Bolt believe that Realism is rooted in the Triune God. Ibid., 212; cf. 221.

<sup>234</sup>More on this below with reference to warrant and circularity in such a presuppositional argument.

<sup>235</sup>Inferentially thus falling into pure fideism!

is distinct from post-conservatives in that Scripture is equated with God's own words. This is by virtue of God's inspiration in the writing of the words—his condescension and concursive inspiration in space and time. Scripture does not gain authority merely when someone is affected by its words on their soul (the illumination by the Spirit). It already is God's Word. It becomes effective in the life of its hearers when the same Spirit presses its truth upon the heart.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE POST- FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF STANLEY J. GRENZ AND JOHN R. FRANKE

#### **Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the advent of postmodernism has spawned new attempts at theological method. With the demise of classic foundationalism in philosophical circles, many theologians have sought to incorporate the postmodern challenge into theology. In an effort to think of how self-attestation is viewed within a postmodern theological framework, this chapter will look primarily at two proponents of a post-conservative theological method—Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this chapter is to present post-conservative evangelical theology’s commitments and presuppositions in an effort to place it in the history of evangelicalism as well as to show its denial of Scripture’s self-attestation as defined in the Protestant camp.

In order to get a precise understanding of post-conservative theological method, several pieces must be put together in order to see why it denies self-attestation. As will be seen, post-conservatives deny Scripture’s self-attestation, due to embracing postmodern

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<sup>1</sup>The term “post-conservative” and its derivatives will be used throughout this chapter to explain Grenz and Franke’s approach because it is for what they opt in their co-authored monograph, Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

philosophical presuppositions,<sup>2</sup> Pannenbergian coherentism, redefinition of speech-act theory and RE, and a reorientation of where authority lies in the theologians norms. In order to delineate post-conservative thought, their writings will be arranged in this way: denial of foundationalism, human situatedness,<sup>3</sup> explanation of the Spirit's relationship to Scripture, and the community's role in theology. These facets ultimately lead to their denial of Scripture's self-authenticating authority.<sup>4</sup>

### **Denying Foundationalism and Theological Method's Task**

Grenz and Franke write,

Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in critical and constructive reflection on the faith, life, and practices of the Christian community. Its task is the articulation of biblically normed, historically informed,

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<sup>2</sup>They opt for a spirit or ethos of postmodernity without all the entailments of it (see Stanley J. Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 108).

<sup>3</sup>For lack of a better word to characterize their use of postmodernism's affirmation of societal constraints, the word "situatedness" has been selected to get at every human's inability to be free from his or her particular context. At the end of the day, situatedness is the positive proposal of postmodernism—whereas a denial of classic foundationalism is its negative proposal. Grenz and Franke also employ the term; see John R. Franke, "The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 201-14; idem, "Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory: Theology and the Nonfoundationalist Turn," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 105-21; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 209. Vanhoozer offers a helpful critique by posing the question and giving his solution: "Is it really the case, for example, that chastened rationality 'is marked by the transition from a realist to a constructionist view of truth and the world? I think this is to confuse an epistemological problem with an ontological one. My own preference would be for a middle position, such as that of Frank Farrell, who argues that some of our languages, vocabularies, and conceptual schemes let certain aspects of reality through better than others." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Disputing about Words? Of Fallible Foundations and Modest Metanarratives," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 187-200.

<sup>4</sup>I hope to show that post-conservatism's well-intentioned proposal fails to define rightly historic evangelical theology's aims, thereby rendering its conclusions ultimately unhelpful. This chapter will not be an exhaustive analysis of Grenz and Franke's proposal. Such an analysis will be offered in chapter five in the historical treatment. I do believe that Grenz and Franke desire to bring biblical Christianity to bear on their cultural milieu. I believe, in the end, their theological method does not fall in the Protestant stream (as will be evaluated in chap. 7) and is detrimental to theology and its application.

and culturally relevant models of the Christian belief-mosaic for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.<sup>5</sup>

Within this definition the three sources for their proposal can be seen: (1) Scripture, (2) tradition, and (3) culture.<sup>6</sup> The norming norm is Scripture—as it is the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit in convicting and guiding God's people.<sup>7</sup> It is very clear that Scripture has preeminence in the theologians' task; yet, the understanding of Scripture is nuanced and explained by its interdependence with the church's history and her present. While creeds and confessions “must be tested by the Scriptures and by their applicability to our situation,”<sup>8</sup> the three resources are inseparable.<sup>9</sup>

Not only is Scripture the *normans normata*, it is also “the foundation of our faith and the source of guidance for our lives. In acknowledging Scripture in this manner, however, we are not glorifying a mere book. Rather, we are actually looking beyond the

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<sup>5</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16.

<sup>6</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe? Revelation and Authority,” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 11-33; idem, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1996), 22.

<sup>7</sup>As Grenz makes clear, though, the three sources comprise *one* source for theology. He writes, “Although they differ significantly from each other in the roles they play, Scripture, heritage, and culture nevertheless compose a single, interrelated, threefold source for theology. And even though they may be treated conceptually in isolation from each other, in practice they are nearly inseparable. We do not first get our understanding of the Bible straight and then look to our common heritage to make sure we are orthodox before finally seeking to understand these matters within our social context. Rather, regardless of the particular ‘text’ being ‘read’ in the moment—whether it be the ‘text’ of Scripture, of heritage, or of culture—we always read it together with the other two partners within the one interconnected dance that comprises theological art. Or, stating the point in another manner, Scripture, heritage, and culture do not comprise three different moments of the Spirit's speaking and hence of our listening. Rather, just as the Spirit who speaks is one Spirit, so also the Spirit's speaking is one speaking. Theology assists in the hearing task by seeking to explicate a truly scriptural, unabashedly Christian, and completely contextual conceptualization of the Christian belief-mosaic for the sake of the church's calling to be, on the basis of its primal past, the sign in the present of the glorious eschatological future of all creation.” Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe?,” 33.

<sup>8</sup>Grenz, *Created for Community*, 22.

Bible to the Spirit who addresses us through its pages. We honor Scripture, because it is the *vehicle through which the Spirit chooses to speak*.”<sup>10</sup> This last piece of the statement hits directly on the issue that lies between post-conservatives and current evangelicalism. According to Grenz and Franke, too many evangelicals have married themselves to classic foundationalism so that they go to the Bible for answers to questions, and not for change in their relationship with Jesus.<sup>11</sup> As will be seen below, Scripture is authoritative because of what the Spirit has chosen to do through its pages, and not an inherent authority.

### **Community and the Theologian**

Since Scripture is the book of the church, the theologian (having presupposed that it is true for his community of faith) begins his task by setting forth the biblical account (and not hemming his argument by rationalistic proofs). Borrowing from Hans Frei,<sup>12</sup> post-conservatism believes that meaning lies primarily in the narrative. Grenz and Franke summarize their thesis: “The point of a biblical narrative does not lie in some event in ancient history that supposedly stands behind the text but in the meaning of the narrative itself.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, “textual-sense interpretation marks an important antidote to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 165. This statement was presented in the previous chapter which offered a historical survey of self-attestation and an apologetic defense of Scripture’s authority as pioneered by Reformed epistemologists. This retraction by Grenz highlights his emphasis on the pietistic relationship between the Spirit and Scripture (see below).

<sup>11</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 37-44. Within these pages the authors use Charles Hodge, Gordon Lewis, and Bruce Demarest to support this claim.

<sup>12</sup>Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1974), esp. 267-324.

<sup>13</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 73.

modernist views of the Bible.”<sup>14</sup> It is a call to be “pre-critical” in one’s approach.<sup>15</sup> That is, the reader should be concerned with the Bible as a text, and not as much as its historical rootedness. They, however, do differentiate themselves from Frei’s program. “[His] program provides neither a complete nor a completely satisfying answer to our quest for an understanding of the normativeness of the Bible as scripture.”<sup>16</sup> This eclecticism leads Grenz and Franke to chide Reformed epistemologist Nicholas Wolterstorff for spending too much time on authorial intent, and not enough time on what the text says.<sup>17</sup> They write, “Further, post-conservatives find an affinity with Paul Ricoeur when they say “the meaning of a text always points beyond itself—it is “not behind the text, but in front of it”—for it projects a way of being in the world, a mode of existence, a pattern of life, and it “points towards a possible world.”<sup>18</sup> The text does not create the world; the Spirit empowers the instrumentality of the text. “The final authority in the church is the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture.”<sup>19</sup> They write,

World construction does not lie in the text itself, even though it is closely bound to the text. Rather, it is ultimately the Spirit’s work. The Spirit speaks through the Bible. In so doing—in appropriately these texts as the instrumentality of this speaking—the Spirit performs the perlocutionary act of creating world. And the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Frei, *Eclipse*, 17-50.

<sup>16</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 73.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 76. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian, 1976), 87; idem, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 176-81.

<sup>19</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 74.

world the Spirit creates is not simply the world surrounding the ancient text itself. It is the eschatological world God intends for creation as disclosed text.<sup>20</sup>

A statement like this is akin to saying that the word of God did not create the world in Genesis 1; it was God who created the world. Calvin, the pneumatological theologian, brought the Word of God and the Spirit of God together in theological method. It is a marriage that must be insisted. To bifurcate the two is to foment a distinction not present in the text of Scripture. It is not merely that the Spirit uses words offered by others. Rather, his carrying along of the biblical authors guarantees that the words of Scripture are his very words (2 Pet 1:21).

### **A Different Interpretation of the Facts of History**

Post-conservatives believe there are two sides to Christian theological method.<sup>21</sup> The first, and most prominent (one which they aim to correct), is that offered by classical foundationalism (or modernism). Modernism has begotten two divergent children—classic liberalism and modern evangelicalism. Both of these groups have sought to build from indubitable facts. The source for their facts is the dividing line between the two. Classic liberalism succumbed to modernity in an attempt to make Christianity relevant to the surrounding culture. “These theologians continue to uphold the primacy of universal human experience as providing the foundation for the theological task.”<sup>22</sup> These theologians would include men like Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Hans Kung, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Langdon Gilkey. This modernist mainline

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>21</sup>For example, those who also identify themselves with revisionist evangelicalism.

Protestant method has come under attack by postliberal mainline theologians. These postliberals draw from Hans Frei's seminal work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Karl Barth's encouragement for a clean break from liberalism, and George Lindbeck's program of defining the world using theological symbols and signs.

Modern evangelicalism follows modernism by superimposing creeds and confessions of the church upon the culture. While they claim *sola Scriptura*, they too often furnish a compendium of statements that do little to engage or listen to the Spirit in the culture. As such, modern evangelicalism has focused too much on the propositions of Scripture and not enough on the Spirit's voice within the text.<sup>23</sup> This voice (The "word of God" as distinct from Scripture) is discerned by the "word the church speaks in the Spirit's power and by the Spirit's authority, and which is thereby connected to Christ himself."<sup>24</sup> Grenz writes,

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<sup>22</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 5.

<sup>23</sup>This focus is linked with Grenz' interpretation of the origins of evangelicalism. He writes, "While theological definitions of what constitutes the evangelical movement may be gratifying to vocational theologians, it is hardly what draws together the 40 or so million self-conscious evangelicals in North America or the great number of participants in the worldwide evangelical movement. Nor could we easily devise a doctrinal statement which every evangelical theologian would both affirm without qualification and confirm as an adequate representation of what is essential to the evangelical vision of the Christian faith. This leads me to wonder if assent to doctrine is the only way, or even the best way, to characterize evangelicalism. Perhaps the essence of what it means to be an evangelical, while related to doctrine and propositions, actually lies deeper than any theological belief system evangelicals supposedly share." Stanley J. Grenz, "An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context," *Didaskalia* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 3-4. Also idem, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 34.

<sup>24</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 71. Grenz and Franke cite Goldingay to avoid the charge of using a canon within the canon. Goldingay writes, "Everyone has a 'working canon,' but to call scripture itself the canon is to imply that scripture as a whole is our norm. A canon within the canon or a clue from outside the canon is not the means by which we decide what material in the canon itself really is normative. . . . The Reformation principle 'the whole of scripture' stands alongside that is 'scripture alone.' If we are to make distinctions within scripture, then, these distinctions are not between normative and non-normative material. Further, insofar as we measure what is said by what is meant or conclude that some material has higher status than other material, we do so on the basis of criteria from within scripture." John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106. So long as the Spirit's voice can be discerned from *within* the words of Scripture, post-conservatism believes it is free from the charge

Bringing Scripture and Spirit together provides the foundation for understanding in what sense the Bible is to be read as text, while undercutting any notion of the Bible as being *inherently* authoritative. The Protestant principle suggests that the authority of Scripture does not ultimately rest with any quality that inheres within it as such (for example, its divine authorship or inspired character). Instead, the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Hence, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is. The Bible is Scripture in that the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative divine speaking to this text.<sup>25</sup>

This quotation is a key summary for how Grenz interprets history. This quotation also misrepresents what evangelical theologians would claim for Scripture. There are two areas of concern that need to be highlighted here. First, the authority of Scripture lies in the Spirit speaking in *and* through the text of Scripture. Grenz has separated the ontological authority of Scripture from its functional authority. That is, Grenz says that Scripture is authoritative because of its effect on its hearers (which is accomplished by the Spirit utilizing the text to speak for him). This perspective, however, is myopic. The Spirit does not merely appropriate a series of human texts and make them effective. Rather, he has breathed out, authored, and authorized the text. In other words, Scripture remains authoritative because the Spirit has spoken these very words. Even when Scripture's hearers remain unchanged from its words, the Spirit's words remain authoritative over them. To state it as Grenz has here is to say nothing more than Scripture is human words that the Spirit uses to accomplish his purposes. Second, as a result, the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* is misrepresented. Given Grenz' assessment, Scripture is not authoritative over people unless and until the Spirit incites

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of imposing on the text. The problem, however, comes when one tries to discern what the Spirit is saying. In other words, one's predilection determines what the Spirit is saying if one is trying to divine his voice.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, "The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text," *Theology Today* 57, no. 3 (2000): 358.

the hearer to convert. To affirm, however, an authority inherent in the text, by virtue of its author, does not preclude the Spirit's appropriating the text in the life of the hearer, historically called "illumination."

Theologians have made clear that the Spirit breathes out the very words of Scripture *and* he illumines people to change their lives. "The Spirit not only thus reveals divine truth, having guided infallibly holy men of old in recording it, but He everywhere attends to it by his power."<sup>26</sup> The Spirit carried men along to write God's words (2 Pet 1:21) "teaching certain things to God's people *and* illumining them so that they can understand things."<sup>27</sup>

Ironically, Grenz disavows what the Westminster divines would clearly affirm—namely, Scripture's inherent authority<sup>28</sup>—by believing he is recovering their intention to link the Spirit with Scripture.

Herman Bavinck is helpful in relating the certainty of faith with the necessary illumination of the Spirit. He writes, "Believing itself is no proof for the truth of that which is believed. There is a huge difference between subjective certainty and objective truth. In the case of faith of belief, everything depends on the grounds on which it rests."<sup>29</sup> Unless there is an objective ground on which to stand (i.e., divine authorship and inspiration), then the believer falls victim to a subjective, vicious circularity. In the same

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<sup>26</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1:532.

<sup>27</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 645.

<sup>28</sup>See *WCF* 1.5, where the Spirit is said to persuade the believer; yet this principle is itself derived from 1.4 where the Scripture authenticates itself and "is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

breath, Bavinck can affirm that which Grenz portrays as antithetical to inherent authority.

Bavinck writes,

To the question ‘Why do you believe?’ Christians reply, ‘Because God has spoken (*Deus dixit*).’ They cannot indicate another, deeper ground. If you then ask them, ‘But why do you believe that God has spoken, say, in Scripture?’ they can only answer that God so transformed them internally that they recognize Scripture as the Word of God; but having said that, they said it all. The witness of God (*viz.* Scripture) is the ground, but God’s grace, the will, is the cause of faith.<sup>30</sup>

Immediately following Bavinck’s discussion of the illumination of the Holy Spirit is the self-authenticating nature of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> It appears, then, that a denial of Scripture’s self-authentication is due to a misunderstanding of the historic Protestant principle of Scripture’s authority inherent in Scripture and applied by the Spirit.

### **Revisionist Theology**

The second camp in evangelical theology, cited by Grenz and Franke, is known as the revisionist branch—that in which Grenz and Franke would locate themselves. Theologians here believe that *all* expressions of faith are to be perpetually tested and tweaked. They want to keep Christians from retreating to a theological sectarianism that does not engage the world at large.<sup>32</sup> Rather than being overly occupied with propositionally precise theological theses, Grenz believes evangelicals are linked by their piety and experiences more than their propositions. He writes,

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<sup>29</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 578. The certainty of faith will be treated in chap. 5, where Calvin’s offense against Rome is explained.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 582.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 583-85.

<sup>32</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 4-9.

Under the guidance of luminaries such as Wesley and, especially, Edwards, the converted self of evangelical piety became the experimental self. *The experimental approach borrowed from empirical science provided the believer with the methodological tool necessary to gain experiential knowledge of divine truth*, whereas the infusion of a new spiritual sense at conversion endowed the converted soul with the ability to direct the understanding and the will toward the attainment of such knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

In this way, experience takes precedent for the evangelical. Therefore, the evangelical's theology should highlight this pietistic, communitarian experience—not propositions.

Outside of the converts' experiences, revisionists teach that God is Lord over Creation and he is unhindered by a text. He, by his Spirit, is able to speak through both the history of the church (tradition) and the current context of culture.<sup>34</sup> Humans are situated in particular cultures and epochs, so that they cannot separate reading and application of Scripture from where and when they live. Whenever doing theology, these three aspects must be taken into account in order to speak about God truly.

### **The Better Way of Postmodern Theory and Method**

Grenz chides modern evangelical theology for being content with making assertions about God without demanding a change in attitude.<sup>35</sup> Grenz states the problem: “In their attempt to find certainty for Christian faith in a world imbued with Cartesian

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<sup>33</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 85 (emphasis added).

<sup>34</sup>John Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory: Theology and the Nonfoundationalist Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 113. Though the Spirit's voice can only be discerned as it is sifted through the interpretive grid of the Spirit's voice in the Scripture (ibid., 114). Vanhoozer offers his critique of this assertion by asking for biblical support—Vanhoozer, “Disputing about Words?” 187-200. So also Chauncy Everett Berry, “Revising Evangelical Theological Method in the Postmodern Context: Stanley J. Grenz and Kevin J. Vanhoozer as Test Cases” (Ph.D. diss. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 104.

<sup>35</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 7-9.

skepticism, theologians followed the philosophers' lead and trotted after the pied piper of foundationalism. The foundationalist impulse led to a reassessment of the nature and role of the Bible in theology and, by extension, in the church."<sup>36</sup> Too often theologians have led people to believe that theology is merely facts that need to be organized and explained as opposed to being "servants of the Spirit and ministers within the community of those who seek to discern the Spirit's voice through the appropriated text."<sup>37</sup>

Evangelicals' desire "to amass the true statements or factual propositions they believed were taught in the pages of scripture. . . . And by bringing these biblical teachings together in a systematic whole, their goal became that of compiling the one, complete, timeless body of right doctrines, which they assumed constituted "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, KJV)."<sup>38</sup> The church's compilation of right, timeless doctrine sought to engage with the culture and justify belief in Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

By moving in this direction, the foundationalist runs the risk of making the Bible unnecessary. Grenz and Franke write,

If the goal of theological inquiry was to extrapolate the system of propositions the divine Communicator has inscripturated in the pages of the text, it would seem that systematic theology could—and eventually would—make the Bible superfluous. Why should the sincere believer continue to read the Bible when biblical truth—correct doctrine—is more readily at hand in the latest systematic compilation offered by the skilled theologian? Why read, that is, for any reason except to

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 59. This is the chief assumption of post-conservatism regarding foundationalist theologians. Also Grenz, *Revisioning*, 114.

<sup>37</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 84.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 62. They cite Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:18, and Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 1:25-27.

<sup>39</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 34-35. Behind this desire lies a presupposition that draws from the Thomist method of starting with general revelation to justify God's existence and then moving into God's special revelation. In both cases apologetics was the motivation behind justifying the theologian's task and adjudication of his culture's ethic.

determine for oneself that the theologian's conclusions are indeed biblical truth—that this theologian had captured the one, true biblical system of doctrine?<sup>40</sup>

The answer to such arrogant, Enlightenment-led assumptions is found in reclaiming the Reformers wedding of the Spirit and the Scripture. Merely because the canon was closed in 397 does not mean “the Spirit's work in inspiration had ceased.”<sup>41</sup> Further, postmodernism offers help in enabling theologians to move beyond the philosophical tenets of the Enlightenment, making it clear that reason has limitations.<sup>42</sup> Every fact is *interpreted* fact. Thus, the one doing the interpreting has a certain grid he brings to the bare facts.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, all knowledge is moral, in that its referent is God.

In *Revisioning the Center*, Grenz looks at Francis Turretin's systematic theology—a model of how timeless propositionalism took precedent. While he acknowledges that Turretin's aim was to present God's truth in a salvific way, he doubts his method. He writes,

To this salvific end, however, natural revelation is insufficient. Rather than being the compilation of truth disclosed in creation and discovered by reason, for Turretin theology is primarily the systematization of the teachings of Scripture, and the object of theology is God as he has revealed himself in his Word. Turretin's theology was likewise oriented toward propositional truth. As Richard Muller concludes, the scholasticism of the seventeenth-century Reformed thinker was an outworking of “the desire to forge a theological orthodoxy, a system of ‘right

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 66-68. Citing the noetic effects of the Fall, Grenz and Franke affirm the necessity of the Spirit speaking through the text of Scripture in order to establish its authority.

<sup>43</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993) 14-15; cf. Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 165. This facet of interpretation is true even in science where interpretations of findings can be debunked by different scientists using the *same* findings.

doctrine.” Turretin’s legacy lies in this basic approach to theology with which his later disciples were imbued.<sup>44</sup>

So although Turretin is not primarily concerned with reason being the judge for right and wrong, he operated from a proclivity for propositional truth—a tendency he should have buttressed with the working and power of the Spirit.

Further, Grenz believes that although contemporary theologians like Carl F. H. Henry are not evidentialists—“those apologists who seek to ground Christian faith on arguments from reason and empirical evidence”<sup>45</sup>—he keeps too much of this same foundationalist agenda by elevating “reason to the status of being the foundational dimension of the human person—a view, he argues, that was universally held prior to the modern era”<sup>46</sup> As a result, both Turretin and Henry do not contribute to the universal discussion. Grenz, therefore, believes evangelicals must move beyond foundationalism. This move merely affirms the “intellectual world lying ‘after modernity.’”<sup>47</sup> He says, “If our theology is to speak the biblical message in our contemporary situation, we must shed the cloak of modernity and reclaim the more profound community outlook in which the biblical people of God were rooted.”<sup>48</sup> Given post-conservatism’s skepticism of individualistic reason it moves toward the community as a safe haven for theologizing.

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<sup>44</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 66. Richard Muller, “Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: Francis Turretin and the Object and Principles of Theology,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 55 (June 1986): 205.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 29.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 73, 74.

Since all knowledge stems from God, the theologian must be careful not to confuse the vehicle of knowledge (in this case, Scripture) with God himself. Put another way, evangelicals must mitigate “against positing a simple, one-to-one correspondence between the revelation of God and the Bible, that is, between the Word of God and the words of scripture.”<sup>49</sup> There needs to be a reformulation of how theologians conceive of their sources. While Scripture is still the norming norm, by virtue of finitude, the theologian always draws upon other sources when speaking about God.

Critiquing Grenz’ approach in *Renewing the Center*, Don Carson analyzes six major points:<sup>50</sup> (1) the questionable use of historical trajectories approach, especially in its questionable interpretation of history; (2) “[Grenz] is utterly unable to detect any weakness in postmodern epistemology and therefore all of his prescriptions for the future assume that postmodernism is essentially correct;”<sup>51</sup> (3) the grounding of epistemology in Pannenbergian eschatological realism; (4) his use of George Lindbeck, which claims that doctrine provides rules for discourse within a community, but does not seek to state that which is true; (5) the emphasis on the community to form beliefs; and (6) “three irritants” of thick jargon, failure to affirm modernism’s use of coherence and not just postmodernism, and the “sidestepping” of “crucial questions to an annoying level.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>To make this claim, Grenz and Franke have cited three examples of modern theologians looking behind the text to affirm its authority: “experiences” offered by liberal theology, “the mighty acts of God” evidenced by Donald Bloesch, and authorial intent offered by exegetical scholars such as Schleiermacher.

<sup>50</sup>D. A. Carson, “Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Stanley J. Grenz’ *Renewing the Center*,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 82-97.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 96. Carson’s critique will be examined more at length in the concluding chapter. It is condensed here merely to offer a framework for the reader as Grenz’ thought is described.

Aware of these critiques, Grenz isolates what he considers Carson's most salient critique by saying,

I want to deny any final autonomy to the human knowing project outside of Christ. Carson's review suggests to me that in the end he is critical of my stance regarding what is "real" not so much because he thinks that it is unbiblical, but because he does not share my perspective regarding the centrality of theology and he is not sympathetic to my rejection of the autonomy of the human sciences. I can only surmise that at least here he retains many of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of modernity, despite the disclaimer that comes near the end of his review.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, Grenz and Franke believe evangelicals must (1) reject modernity and (2) "live and think in a realm of chastened rationality characterized by the demise of modern epistemological foundationalism."<sup>54</sup> Franke writes,

At the heart of the postmodern ethos is the attempt to rethink the nature of rationality in the wake of the modern project. This rethinking has resulted not in irrationality, as is often claimed by less informed opponents of postmodern thought, but rather in numerous redescrptions and proposals concerning appropriate construals of rationality and knowledge after modernity. In spite of their variety, these attempts can be broadly classified as producing a chastened rationality that is more inherently self-critical than the constructions of rationality common in the thought-forms of modernity.<sup>55</sup>

Many in evangelicalism have questioned whether it is possible to embrace postmodernism in such a way, since "postmodernity is notoriously difficult to pin down."<sup>56</sup> Grenz and Franke believe that they have adopted the insights of postmodernism, and others should not accuse them of a philosophical assumption that claims people can

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<sup>53</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, "Toward an Undomesticated Gospel: A Response to D. A. Carson," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 461. This point is the primary difference that Grenz admits is a departure from what Carson identifies as conventional evangelicalism.

<sup>54</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 19.

<sup>55</sup>John R. Franke, "Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory: Theology and the Nonfoundationalist Turn," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 108.

know nothing about the external world.<sup>57</sup> Rather, post-conservatives should be located underneath a larger cultural umbrella of postmodernism that is skeptical of bare facts as interpreted by unbiased observers.<sup>58</sup>

Archie Spencer criticizes Grenz for having a one-sided, overly-simplified interpretation of postmodernism.<sup>59</sup> He writes,

[Grenz] comes very close to sounding like a ‘postmodern foundationalist’ for whom the first task of theology is to identify the cultural questions that must be addressed, ‘and to translate the gospel into a currently understandable conceptuality’. This runs the risk of falling into the method that Lindbeck characterizes as ‘modern foundationalism’. Such a method could also risk subjecting the agenda of theology to the predominate culture. This was precisely the same mistake that theology made in response to the Enlightenment.<sup>60</sup>

Post-conservatism merely seeks to admit what the failed modernist project has made clear. That is, humans are unable to rid themselves of context. Franke writes,

In philosophical circles foundationalism refers to a much stronger epistemological stance than is entailed in this general observation about how beliefs intersect. At the heart of the foundationalist agenda is the desire to overcome the uncertainty generated by the tendency of fallible human beings to error and the inevitable

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>57</sup>John R. Franke, “The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 205. See also Stanley J. Grenz, “Beyond Foundationalism: Is a Nonfoundationalist Evangelical Theology Possible?” *Christian Scholars’ Review* 30 (2000): 57-66, idem, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 137.

<sup>58</sup>This is how Grenz and Franke portray modern evangelical scholars who affirm Scripture’s self-witness; an interpretation that will be critiqued at the end of this work—as this chapter is merely descriptive of the post-conservative methodology. They often cite Nancey Murphy’s distinctions between Continental deconstructivism and the Anglo-American constructive postmodern thinkers in order to explain their difference of opinion with philosophical postmodernism—as opposed to a postmodern sentiment. They also move in the direction of Reformed epistemology—*a la* Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Although it is questionable as to whether Reformed epistemologists would place themselves in the postmodern philosophical camp, Grenz and Franke often appeal to them as post-conservatives to buttress their case. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 20, 31, 47-49.

<sup>59</sup>Archie J. Spencer, “Culture, Community and Commitments: Stanley J. Grenz on Theological Method,” *SJT* 57, no. 3 (2004): 338-60, particularly 354-55.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 344.

disagreements and controversies that follow. Foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some means of grounding the entire edifice of human knowledge on invincible certainty.<sup>61</sup>

Both liberalism and conservative theologians have eaten fruit from the same tree of foundationalism.<sup>62</sup> Both of these disparate camps need to confess their finitude and flawed condition, affirming that “epistemic foundationalism is neither possible nor desirable for created and sinful persons.”<sup>63</sup> The nonfoundationalist approach provides a way out of “demand[ing] that knowledge systems include a class of beliefs that are immune from criticism; rather, [that] all beliefs are subject to critical scrutiny.”<sup>64</sup> The theologian’s task is to dialogue and contribute to the “web of interrelated, interdependent beliefs.”<sup>65</sup>

In a thorough analysis of Grenz’ theological methodology, Brian S. Harris believes Grenz’ synthesizing of evangelical historical and methodology is reductionistic and one-sided.<sup>66</sup> Rather than Scripture being a repository for propositional truths, it contains “the original *kerygma* of the faith community.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, the theologians’ job lies in listening to the voice of the Spirit in the Scriptures, the Tradition, and the Culture, and not merely explicating the Scriptures. To put it another way, the Spirit uses the text of Scripture (which has been authorized by the community of faith) to speak to God’s

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<sup>61</sup>Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory,” 109; 112.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Brian S. Harris, *The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz: Constructing Evangelical Theology from Scripture, Tradition, and Culture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 106.

people. “The role of the theologian is to help the Christian community understand the paradigmatic narratives through which the Spirit creates the community’s new identity.”<sup>68</sup> Scripture, then, is merely a functional authority. Its ontological authority is eschewed, since it is only when the believer is illumined by the Spirit that Scripture truly carries any weight.<sup>69</sup>

In order to show that their understanding of the human condition is not novel to evangelicalism, Grenz and Franke appeal to accommodation. They write, “The church has long maintained the distinction between finite knowledge and divine knowledge. Even revelation does not provide human beings with a knowledge that exactly corresponds to that of God. The infinite qualitative distinction between God and human beings suggests the accommodated character of all human knowledge of God.”<sup>70</sup> Human language was not imposed upon by God’s sovereignty. Rather, God entered into the human situation and accommodated to man’s finite and flawed understanding of who he is. This marriage between divine and human is seen in both the person of Christ as well as the hypostatic union found in the product of Scripture. Due to God’s entering into man’s condition there are veiled and unveiled aspects to Scripture—so that it is a

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>69</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65, 80.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 209.

dynamic, not static, relationship between God's people and his Word.<sup>71</sup> How do they formulate their doctrine of Scripture?

### The Spirit's Scripture

The dynamic nature of Scripture is attested to in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "*The supreme judge* by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, *can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.*"<sup>72</sup> Grenz and Franke believe the final condition ("the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture") is key to understanding the historical understanding of the church's view of Scripture. Grenz writes,

We make a crucial beginning by reconnecting the Bible to the Spirit, whose book it is. The Bible is not authoritative because it is either inspired or inerrant; it is authoritative because it is the instrumentality of the Spirit. The Spirit has chosen to give us this book and to speak to the church through its pages. When we affirm the authority of the Bible, therefore, what we are really doing is affirming the authority of the Spirit whose book the Bible is. The theologians' task, in turn, is to assist the people of God in hearing the Spirit's voice, so that we can live as God's people in the world.<sup>73</sup>

By employing speech-act theory, Grenz and Franke speak of the Spirit appropriating the text of Scripture to accomplish his purposes (the illocutionary act).<sup>74</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup>Grenz and Franke borrow Barth's subjective/objective elements to Scripture. That is, God reveals himself (objectively) and the faith to understand what is hidden (subjective); Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 209-10. The work of the Spirit (subjective) will be taken up below.

<sup>72</sup>WCF, 1.10 (emphasis added).

<sup>73</sup>Grenz, "An Agenda," 10.

<sup>74</sup>"The Spirit speaks through the text; that is, the Spirit appropriates the text and thereby performs the illocutionary act of addressing us in these various ways"; see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 75; cf. idem, 73. One cannot but ask what they believe about the locutions of Scripture. That is, are the *words* of Scripture God's words? Are they God's words insofar that they effect change in

speaking of an appropriated text, they utilize Nicholas Wolterstorff's theory of appropriated discourse. In this theory, Wolterstorff wrestles with the possibility of God speaking to humans in human language. Wolterstorff explains the theory this way:

Sometimes one person says something and another remarks, "I agree with that" or "She speaks for me too" or "Those are also my convictions" or "I share those commitments," or words to that effect. . . . Or a person says, in a parliamentary session, "I second the motion." In all such cases, one is not just appropriating *the text* of the first person as the medium of one's own discourse; one is appropriating *the discourse* of that other person. One's own discourse is a function of that other person's discourse. What the second person says is determined, in good measure, by what the first person said.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note that when God appropriates discourse, he is not merely signing off on a document like a businessman does for a report written by his underling. When God appropriates the text written by his emissaries, he also appropriates and binds himself to their intention in writing—their illocutionary stance.<sup>76</sup>

With regards to theology, Wolterstorff aligns himself with what Barth attempted to do (though not coming to a full realization of Wolterstorff's theory). Wolterstorff affirms Barth's emphasis on the preaching of the Bible as the contemporary appropriation of divine discourse. In other words, "God speaks in Jesus Christ, and only there; then on multiple occasions, God activates, ratifies, and fulfills in us what God says in Jesus Christ."<sup>77</sup> The way in which God fulfills in us what he purposes is by the work of the Spirit in illumination. Returning to the *WCF* 1.10 Grenz and Franke write, "Bringing

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the hearer? What if the words found in Scripture are read aloud and do not effect change in the hearers? Are they, as a result, not God's words? Or are they not God's words to that particular person? The answer to these questions is quite simply that the Spirit does not perform the locutions of the text, but appropriates what is written by man. See Grenz, "How Do We Know What to Believe?," 23.

<sup>75</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 53-54.

scripture and Spirit together provides the foundation for understanding in what sense the Bible is the norming norm in theology and, in turn, stands as the essential prerequisite for reading the Bible as text.”<sup>78</sup>

Post-conservatives affirm the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scripture based on the one who speaks in it (the Spirit—who is without error or fail in his perlocutions).<sup>79</sup>

Thomas McCall is helpful in illuminating such an understanding of the relationship between the Spirit and Scripture. He writes, “Scripture just *is* God’s Word (at least with respect to locution and illocution), but the divine speech act is incomplete without the perlocutionary work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>80</sup>

Too many times, Scripture has been treated as a “separate article prior to the confessional statements concerning God. The Reformed approach seeks to carry out the theological task understood as the delineation of God’s self-disclosure, and it elevates the Bible as the deposit of that divine revelation.”<sup>81</sup> Although there have been advantages to this approach—namely, its clarity and precision—it has paid a great price.

Transformed in this manner into a book of doctrine, the Bible is easily robbed of its dynamic character. Separating the doctrine of Scripture from its natural embedding in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit conceptually separates Scripture from the Spirit, whose vehicle of operation it is. Treating revelation and Scripture

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>78</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

<sup>79</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community*, 174.

<sup>80</sup>Thomas McCall, “On Understanding Scripture as the Word of God,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford, 2009), 178.

<sup>81</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 114.

as prolegomenon can easily result in a static understanding of the relationship between the two.<sup>82</sup>

Three problems result for the Reformed approach, it: (1) only pays “lip service to the corollary affirmation that the biblical documents are human products”;<sup>83</sup> (2) tends to “deemphasize the Spirit’s ongoing activity in speaking through Scripture in favor of a focus on the Spirit’s completed work in inspiration”;<sup>84</sup> (3) can “exchange the dynamic of the ongoing movement of the Spirit speaking to the community of God’s people through the pages of the Bible for the book we hold in our hands.”<sup>85</sup> By affirming that the Spirit should be wedded to the words of Scripture, it is not as though Scripture dropped from the heavens. Post-conservatives “gladly affirm that the Bible is the deposit of divine revelation and readily acknowledge that these human words are the Word of God.”<sup>86</sup>

Authority in the church is not found in the pages of Scripture, but *in the person* who inspires the words of Scripture. Bernard Ramm writes, “The proper principle of authority within the Christian church must be . . . the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, which are the product of the Spirit’s revelatory and inspiring action.”<sup>87</sup> The Spirit *and* Scripture form the foundation for understanding in what way Scripture is God’s word.

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<sup>82</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 114.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>87</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 64; also Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 28.

Post-conservatives have highlighted one aspect of Calvin’s explanation of Scripture’s self-attestation—namely, illumination (the subjective aspect of Scripture’s authority).<sup>88</sup> The Bible is authoritative insofar that the Spirit uses it as an instrument to affect his hearers. “The Spirit speaking through its pages is our sole authority. Only the Bible is so intimately related to the historical revelation of God as itself to be termed “revelation.””<sup>89</sup> In other words, Scripture is revelation because it is intimately tied to the historical activity of God—and not because Scripture itself is a divine activity of God. This sounds very similar to a history of religions explanation of why Scripture is set aside as the church’s book.

At precisely this juncture Grenz and Franke, ironically, bifurcate the Scripture and the Spirit. Along with Barth, they affirm that Scripture is merely written words until the Spirit appropriates these human words to accomplish his illocutions.<sup>90</sup> “The presence of revelation is integrally tied to its human reception.”<sup>91</sup> They write, “Through the rare use of *theopneustos*, which may intend an allusion to God’s breathing into the nostrils of Adam making him spring to life, Paul declared that “God breathes into the Scripture” thereby making it useful. As the evangelical Greek scholar Edward Goodrick concludes,

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<sup>88</sup>Although it is true that they write that our knowledge consists in an external principle (inspired Scripture) and an internal principle (the internal testimony of the Spirit), given Grenz and Franke’s postmodern presuppositions of culture, Scripture merely provides the grammar for faith rather than being an objective standard by which all experience and interpretations of life are to be judged. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 104.

<sup>89</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 134.

<sup>90</sup>A charge typically leveled at Barth.

<sup>91</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68. This is their affirmation following a (Barthian?) quotation by Donald Bloesch where he says, “Revelation is God speaking and the human being responding through the power of God’s Spirit. . . . Revelation is the conjunction of divine revealing and human response.” See Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), 1:62-63.

the text focuses on the surpassing value of the Spirit-energized scriptures and not on some purported “pristine character of the autographs.”<sup>92</sup> Grenz and Franke call this the “pneumatological theological method.”<sup>93</sup>

Regarding the work of the Spirit in the function of the text, Franke writes,

This points to the capacity of the text to speak beyond the context in which it was originally composed. In short, as John Goldingay declares, the text “calls a new world into being.” However, the point that needs to be stressed here is that this capacity for world construction, *while bound closely to the text, does not lie in the text itself. Instead, this result is ultimately the work of the Spirit speaking through the text as the instrumentality of world creation.* Further, the world the Spirit creates is not simply the world surrounding the ancient text or the contemporary world, but rather the eschatological world God intends for creation as disclosed, displayed, and anticipated by the text.<sup>94</sup>

Again, the Spirit cannot be bound to the confines of the text—its original meaning. Instead, evangelicals must affirm the intentionality of the text (*a la* Paul Ricoeur). What does the text (taken as a whole) intend to do to the reader? The reader must bring together the explanation (objective) and the understanding (subjective) of the text.<sup>95</sup> Grenz writes,

We must never conclude that our attempts to come to know the mind of the author of a biblical text can exhaust the Spirit’s speaking to us in the text. Although the Spirit appropriates the text in its internal meaning and hence “what the author said” places limits on what the Spirit can possibly be saying in the text, the Spirit’s ultimate goal is always to communicate to *us* in *our* situation. . . . What

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<sup>92</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65; citing Edward Goodrick, “Let’s Put 2 Timothy 3:16 Back into the Bible,” *JETS* 25, no. 4 (December 1982): 486-87.

<sup>93</sup>Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory,” 112.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 113 (emphasis added).

<sup>95</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 43. See also Merold Westphal, “Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Religion,” in *Reading Ricoeur*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Albany, NY: State University, 2008), 118-19. Westphal calls Ricoeur’s approach an “inverted intentionality” so that the reader objectifies the text.

perlocutionary act does the Spirit seek to accomplish in his act of speaking in Scripture? The answer may be stated quite simply: The Spirit creates “world.”<sup>96</sup>

Grenz characterizes the grammatico-historical method of interpretation to say that the interpreter seeks to “exhaust” the meaning. Here, then, the vertical intention of the Spirit in the original moment of inspiration is subsumed under the illumination and application of the text by the reader. Therefore, the intention of the author is inverted so that the reader objectifies the text. Depending on the *sitz im Leben* of the reader, the text, then, takes on a different illocutionary force and perlocutionary intent.

What the Spirit *does* takes precedence over what the Scripture *is*. Grenz introduces two terms in explaining this world-creating perlocution: “paradigmatic event” and “interpretive framework.” The former is “a historical occurrence that captures the imagination of a community in such a manner that it shapes the community’s way of conceiving the totality of reality as well as the community’s understanding of its ongoing experience of reality.”<sup>97</sup> The latter is mediated by Scripture, and “the Spirit creates in the present a foretaste of the eschatological world and constitutes us as an eschatological people who serve as a sign pointing to the new creation that God is already fashioning.”<sup>98</sup> In fact, the dynamic provided by the Spirit necessarily leads the believer toward an “eschatological realism.”<sup>99</sup> This language is borrowed from Grenz’ *Doktorvater*, Wolfhart Pannenberg.

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<sup>96</sup>Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 24.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 213.

## Pannenbergian Coherentism and Eschatological Expectation

As Grenz continued to think about and discuss theological method, he began to move toward Pannenbergian conceptions of reality, truth, and the nature of Scripture.<sup>100</sup>

There are two major elements of Pannenberg's thought that supply the post-conservative paradigm: truth as history (also called coherentism) and eschatological realism. It is clear that by employing the latter he "attempts to go beyond Lindbeck's [cultural-linguistic approach] by employing Pannenberg's eschatological realism."<sup>101</sup> In essence, Grenz links history and the *eschaton* in order to get out of the cultural quagmire that would keep the Bible from saying anything true. That is, he offers a "quasi-realism."<sup>102</sup> Since finite human beings are inextricably linked to their geography, history, and socio-economic influences, truth is not something to be grasped in propositional form. Rather, truth is the synthesis of the interconnectedness of all beliefs and realities across time and space. Revelation is historical, not propositional.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Steven Knowles makes the observation that there are two phases to Grenz' thought. The first phase was conventionally evangelical. The second came with the advent of his work *Revisioning the Center*, where he became increasingly skeptical of foundationalist presuppositions of human reason and adopted Pannenberg's conceptions of reality, coherentism, eschatological hope, and truth. Steven Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism: The Theological Methodology of Stanley J. Grenz* (London: Ashgate, 2010), 97-98.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>102</sup>Berry, "Revising Evangelical Theological Method," 83. Berry cites Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 3-43, Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 245-48, Grenz, "Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists," *Zygon* 35, no. 2 (June 2000): 348-53, Grenz, "'Scientific' Theology/'Theological' Science: Pannenberg and the Dialogue Between Theology and Science," *Zygon* 34, no. 1 (March 1999): 162, Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 80-81, 266-73.

<sup>103</sup>See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1969); idem, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:230-57; idem, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:397-453.

Pannenberg writes, “If theology must hold fast to the historical action of God even at the level of facticity, it cannot surrender the concept of history. On this depends the reality of what is said about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and therefore the soberness and seriousness of belief in the God of the Bible.”<sup>104</sup> He then launches from God’s revelation of himself in history in Jesus Christ and follows Karl Barth’s location of revelation in the person of Jesus, though nuanced.<sup>105</sup> This discussion then causes Pannenberg to state that “there is knowledge of God only in retrospect of his past action in history. . . . [T]he knowledge of God that is thereby imparted can stand only at the end of a sequence of revelatory events.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, to know God truly can happen only at the end of time (the *eschaton*), once all the sequences of revelatory events have been completed. He concludes, “As the revelation of God in his historical action moves towards the still outstanding future of the consummation of history, its claim to reveal the one God who is the world’s Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer is open to future verification in history, which is as yet incomplete, and which is still exposed, therefore, to the question of its truth.”<sup>107</sup>

In this way, Grenz reorients the theologian’s task from offering a systematic construct to setting forth a biblically interpretive framework for how to understand the contemporary context. “By its very nature, the systematic articulation of the Christian interpretive framework takes the form of an integrated statement of Christian doctrine.

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<sup>104</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:232.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 244-45.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 257.

This leads inevitably to the kind of coherentist theological method Pannenberg has pioneered.”<sup>108</sup> In this way, then, the theologian merely sets forth the Christian worldview to the surrounding culture without having to defend it from rationalists. That is, the Christian theologian offers *an* interpretation of the world. Once the interlocutors hear his worldview, and sees the coherency of his belief, he will be apt to listen to the theology’s implications.<sup>109</sup>

### **Coherentism and Speech-Act Theory**

Grenz and Franke use several tools to formulate their theological method.

Along with Pannenberg they have utilized speech-act theory in order to explain how the text and the Spirit communicate to the reader.

Our acknowledgement of the Bible as the final authority in the church and hence as the norming norm in theology has led to the conclusion that the Spirit performs the perlocutionary act of fashioning “world” through the illocutionary act of speaking through Scripture, that is, through appropriating the biblical text. This world-constructing act occurs as the Spirit creates a community of persons who live out in the present the paradigmatic narrative of the Bible, that is, who view all of life through the interpretive framework the text discloses.<sup>110</sup>

Again, they write,

If the goal of reading is to hear the Spirit speak, then the hermeneutical center to scripture does not lie so much in theology in general as in the biblical message as a whole, that is, in the overarching goal and purposes of God to create an

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<sup>108</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 50

<sup>109</sup>Note the semblance of presuppositionalism in this method. The post-conservative boldness is commendable in that it does not need to give endless proofs to prove that the Bible should be heeded. Rather, he is able to presuppose the truthfulness of Scripture. The influence of Reformed epistemology (*a la* Plantinga and Wolterstorff) is readily seen here as well. At the end of the day, the validity of the Christian’s voice is found in Jesus being the best model for how to understand the cohesion of the world (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 77, 81). The primary difference, however (and which will become evident in the chapter of this dissertation on the historical contribution), is the grounding of authority in the objective text of Scripture.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

eschatological world as indicated by scripture in its entirety. Theology provides a provisional guide in our attempt to hear this pneumatic singularity in scripture.<sup>111</sup>

This eschatological expectation keeps post-conservativism from falling prey to utter subjectivity. While truth is objective and knowable, its complete coherence can never be realized now but only at the end of time because only God knows the world objectively and outside of cultural bounds. The fullness of God's self-disclosure will only come at the end of time, but "revelation is nevertheless a present reality, for the eschatological unveiling of God has appeared proleptically in history."<sup>112</sup> Knowledge is provisional. Yet the coherentist does not fall prey to subjectivity and relativity because he still believes truth is objective, though not attainable beyond doubt since it remains in the mind of God and will be revealed in the future. "Because truth is objective, good reasons can be given in the present for the Christian eschatological hope."<sup>113</sup> While this is true, in order to know anything in the present people need the Spirit to illuminate history.<sup>114</sup> Grenz believes that while the present, temporary world serves as a foretaste of eternity, it is subservient to the greater, truer reality found in eternity.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 86-87. So also "At the heart of the tradition and the role of tradition in theology is the eschatological directedness of the Spirit's work in guiding the community of faith into the purposes and intentions of God that form a divinely given *telos* ultimately realized only at the consummation" (ibid., 127).

<sup>112</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 129.

<sup>113</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 39.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 52; cf. Grenz, *Revisioning*, 129.

<sup>115</sup>This is sharply critiqued by D. A. Carson where he believes the key difference between him and Grenz is the following: "The mere fact that this world is pass-ing away and the eschatological world is final and eternal does not mean that the latter is more 'real' than the former. . . . That is to confuse the category of eternality with the category of reality. Something that is temporary, while it (temporarily) exists, is just as 'real' as something that is eternal." It is unfortunate that Grenz does not engage with the critique. He merely says that they have to agree to disagree. He believes that the essential difference

A final aspect to Pannenberg's theological method is his grounding it in religion rather than in Scripture. That is, theology is an anthropological endeavor as much as it is a study of God—i.e., who do men say that God is?<sup>116</sup> What is more, Pannenberg redefined what general and special revelation are. The former is available to all people so that anthropology and Christology can be derived from observation of the world and man—no need to appeal to Scripture's definition. The latter is historical—geographically and chronologically particular. Pannenberg's definition of theology (being the human reflection on the divine) apparently entails his move toward the community and equivocating general and special revelation.<sup>117</sup> In both cases, the Spirit is needed to bring meaning to the disciple. Since God saw fit to appropriate particular texts during the early years of the community of faith, there needs to be a new emphasis on the interconnectedness between ecclesiology and pneumatology. In other words, "the same Spirit whose work accounts for the formation of the Christian community empowers it to accomplish his purpose, which include the production and authorization of the biblical texts. . . . [pointing] toward an appropriate pneumatological-ecclesiological, and hence nonfoundational, understanding of tradition."<sup>118</sup> This begins a discussion begun by

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between the two epochs is ontological—nodding to Scripture, Augustine, and Lewis. He fails to engage in the discussion that temporality does not make our situation less real. See Grenz, "Toward an Undomesticated Gospel," 455-61.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 41. One cannot help but think that this is the direction post-conservatism moves given is proclivity to depend on the community's history and current climate. This aspect will be addressed in detail below.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 52. While I do not equate Pannenberg with post-conservatism, this section has been offered to explain the major influence for theological method in Grenz' program. Various strands of Pannenberg's method will become evident as post-conservatism's use of the Spirit and the community as the grounding for theological method.

<sup>118</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, "Theological Heritage as Hermeneutical Trajectory: Toward a Nonfoundationalist Understanding of the Role of Tradition in Theology," in *Ancient &*

postmodern theory that had drawn attention to the inability of humans to shed themselves of their culture, epoch, and geography (i.e., situatedness).

### **Situatedness**

Employing Paul Ricoeur again,<sup>119</sup> Grenz and Franke say,

We must never conclude that exegesis alone can exhaust the Spirit's speaking to us through the text. Although the Spirit's illocutionary act is to appropriate the text in its internal meaning (i.e., to appropriate what the author said), the Spirit appropriates the text with the goal of communicating to us in *our* situation, which, while perhaps paralleling in certain respects that of the ancient community, is nevertheless unique. . . . We read the text cognizant that we are the contemporary embodiment of a centuries-long interpretive tradition within the Christian community (and hence we must pay attention to our culture).<sup>120</sup>

Exegesis is not enough. Scripture creates a world; it is not a document merely to be studied and dissected like a cadaver. It is living and breathing because the Spirit has breathed, is breathing, and will breathe life into it.

The text as it stands is bound to a primitive Christian culture. They have priority because they came at the beginning of the community of faith. Paul's writings have preeminence over Athanasius because Paul was prior. Since the community heard the Spirit's voice in the writings of Scripture, they collected them and made it their constitution—their canon. Thus, it has priority because it is prior. The Bible provides “the categories by means of which we as the Christian community understand ourselves, our

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*Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century, Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden*, ed. Kenneth Tanner and Christopher A. Hall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 224; see also Stanley J. Grenz, “Deconstructing Epistemological Certainty: An Engagement with William J. Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (1998),” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 44. Grenz believes William J. Abraham goes too far in expanding the boundaries of canon (to include tradition) and opts for what Avery Dulles calls “traditioning”—where the Spirit inspired the primitive church to recognize and authorize writings as authoritative for the community.

<sup>119</sup>See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2:61-99, where Ricoeur discusses “games with time.”

world and our calling in the world. Through Scripture, the Spirit provides the interpretive framework for our lives.”<sup>121</sup> Theology must be engaged from *within*. Theologians cannot divorce themselves from Christ in order to explain the Bible. They live and move and have their being in the community of faith. Their explanations for the world always come *out of* their experience and situatedness. To try to rid oneself of his culture would be for naught.<sup>122</sup> There is no way to extrapolate propositional truth from our existence. Theologians always speak the grammar of faith within and for the community.<sup>123</sup> Grenz writes, “Bloesch’s characterization of the essence of the movement as doctrine plus experience is a step in the right direction. However, I would assert that we ought to place the two dimensions in the reverse order.”<sup>124</sup>

Theologians are not sterile scientists; but like scientists they can only ever *know* things tacitly.<sup>125</sup> As epistemological theorist Michael Polanyi offers,

The Enlightenment weakened ecclesiastical authority and that modern positivism has denied justification to all transcendent values. . . . It was only when the philosophy of Enlightenment had weakened the intellectual authority of the Christian churches, that Christian aspiration spilled over into man’s secular thoughts, and vastly intensified our moral demands on society. The shattering of

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<sup>120</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 75.

<sup>121</sup>Grenz, “An Agenda,” 10. Here Grenz employs Lindbeckian use of grammar to explain coherentist truth. See Grenz, “Articulating,” 116-19.

<sup>122</sup>“Plantinga and Wolterstorff acknowledge the inevitability of our being situated in a particular community and the indispensable role our respective communities play in shaping our conceptions of rationality, as well as the religious beliefs we deem basic.” Grenz, *Renewing*, 201.

<sup>123</sup>Grenz, “An Agenda,” 11, 15.

<sup>124</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 30.

<sup>125</sup>Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1966); also Jerry H. Gill, *The Possibility of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 130-37.

ecclesiastical control may have been morally damaging in the long run, but its effect was to raise the standards of social morality.<sup>126</sup>

In this way, then, all cognizant humans are explorers of our world—never arriving, always traveling.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, absolute objectivity is elusive because all knowledge depends on the individual.

Although people remain firmly planted in their culture, Christians are able to speak inter-religiously. Grenz writes, “Christians can assert the finality of Christ, because Jesus reveals the fullest conception of God as the community of the trinitarian persons. Thereby, the Christian gospel moves beyond the worship of the Most High God to community with the triune One.”<sup>128</sup>

Theologians must shed themselves of the early Wittgenstein, where language corresponds in a 1:1 relationship with the world around the observer, and become enlightened as he was later realizing that all people can do is play language games. There is no objective viewpoint; therefore, there is no single linguistic description that can provide an objective conception of the “real” world.<sup>129</sup> However, unlike liberal theologians (i.e., Schleiermacher), religious experience is not the grand arbiter of truth in the world.<sup>130</sup> People do have beliefs that form a system, a grid, through which they view the world. Yet, due to its situatedness,

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<sup>126</sup>Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 56-57.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>128</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, “Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Religions,” *JES*, 31, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1994): 49. For a critique of this see Berry, “Revising Evangelical Theological Method,” 104.

<sup>129</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

Theology can no longer model itself after the foundationalist metaphor of constructing an edifice. We cannot spin our wheels constructing elaborate prolegomena, thinking thereby we have laid a sure foundation for the compilation of seemingly separable units of knowledge we then elaborate, whether that knowledge be biblical teaching or expressions of the highest human aspirations. Instead, we ought to view Christian doctrine as comprising a “belief-mosaic” and see theology, in turn, as the exploration of Christian doctrine viewed as an interrelated, unified whole. And we ought to envision our constructive work as leading to a mosaic of interlocking pieces that presents a single pattern, rather than merely to a collection of beads on a string.<sup>131</sup>

Theologians need not spend inordinate time trying to construct impenetrable *prolegomena*, as though reason is the grand jury in any claim to truth. For too long, systematic theologians have sought to earn a hearing from the world at large by appealing to reason *apart from* God’s special revelation.<sup>132</sup> The non-Christian is unable to give a coherent account of the world, for logic, math, science, philosophy, apart from the biblical worldview. How can a Christian theologian do any different?

### **Communal Key**

Given everyone’s inability to rid themselves of biases and cultural accoutrements, post-conservatism believes Christians can find solace and security in the community of faith.<sup>133</sup> When Christians are born again, they are born into a family of faith—past, present, and future. Olson and Grenz write the following:

We propose a theological method that gives rise to a theology that lies beyond the demise of foundationalism. Such a theology is the product of the reflection of the Christian community in its local expressions. Despite its local nature, such a theology is in a certain sense global. It explicates the Christian belief-mosaic in

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>132</sup>This neglect will be treated more fully in chap. 7.

<sup>133</sup>Reformed epistemologists go in this direction as well—Grenz, “Articulating,” 120.

accordance with the ecumenical faith of the church throughout its history and on behalf of the church throughout the world.<sup>134</sup>

While local congregations are bound by time and location, the universal church is not. Therefore, a faithful theologian will listen to all the voices of the church.

Doctrinal and theological progress for the reformist involves the discovery of “new light” flowing from the biblical narratives. Reformists maintain that by reflecting on the meanings of revelation “in the light of contemporary problems, theology can discover new solutions that may have even seemed heretical to earlier generations steeped in philosophies and cultures alien to the biblical thought world.”<sup>135</sup>

This need to look back in time and around ecumenically stems from God’s original design—community.<sup>136</sup> Post-conservatives, then, have relocated from the objective authority of the written text to the community of faith. “The Bible’s status as scripture is not dependent on whether or not we *individually* acknowledge the Spirit’s voice speaking through scripture. Rather, the Bible remains objectively scripture because it is the book of the church.”<sup>137</sup>

Dependence upon the community’s understanding, however, does not mean that subjectivism is the result. The truthfulness of the Bible is maintained by holding fast to the Bible as “objectively divine Scripture” and a right understanding of a bibliology from above *and* below.<sup>138</sup> Scripture function as “the constitution of an ongoing community. They hold this place insofar as they are the product of the foundational stage

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<sup>134</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 26.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 9, quoting Roger E. Olson, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” *Christianity Today* 42 (February 9, 1998): 44.

<sup>136</sup>Grenz, “Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Religions,” 61.

<sup>137</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

<sup>138</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 125.

in the history of the church.”<sup>139</sup> The community decided to come under the teaching of Scripture—so its proper interpretation functions as the arbiter for coherent truth for the individual believer.<sup>140</sup> By joining hands and coming under the canon of faith, the individual believer protects himself from subjectivism. Grenz and Franke write,

A theology of Word and Spirit need not lapse into subjectivism, however [as espoused by Bloesch and affirmed by Grenz and Franke]. What leads to subjectivism is the articulation of such a theology in the context of a basically individualistic understanding of the event of revelation. In other words, the problem of subjectivism arises only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community.<sup>141</sup>

Here, there is an interlocking of the biblical vision (for community) and the postmodern ethos (of communities).<sup>142</sup>

God miraculously revealed himself to Israel and the early church through the Exodus and Jesus Christ. Their preservation of these events in writing made them authoritative.<sup>143</sup>

Through the interaction of each succeeding generation with the biblical documents, the paradigmatic events and the early confrontation with these events become a continual source of revelation for the ongoing life of the community. Scripture is the foundational record of how the ancient faith community responded in the the context of a trajectory of historical situations to the awareness that God has acted to constitute this people as a covenant community. *In this way* the Bible stands as the informing and forming canon for the community throughout its history.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 167-68.

<sup>141</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>143</sup>See Donald Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 187.

<sup>144</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 77 (emphasis added). Scripture is authoritative merely because its writings were the earliest records of God’s redemptive activity—not as though the Spirit breathed out the locutions through the pen of Peter, Paul, John, and the apostolic band.

Theology becomes anthropology. “[Revisioned evangelical theology] conceives theology as reflection on the faith commitment of the believing community.”<sup>145</sup>

The community is key to the Bible’s authority because it preceded the Bible.

Grenz and Franke write,

The community precedes the production of the scriptural texts and is responsible for their content and for the identification of particular texts for inclusion in an authoritative canon to which it has chosen to make itself accountable. Apart from the Christian community, the texts would not have taken their particular and distinctive shape. Apart from the authority of the Christian community, there would be no canon of authorized texts. In short, apart from the Christian community the Christian Bible would not exist. The Bible, then, is the product of the community of faith that produced it.<sup>146</sup>

This assertion presents a confusion that should not exist in Protestantism (let alone evangelicalism). If Scripture is defined as post-conservatism has, then this confusion must follow. Scripture is not merely the community’s retelling of the mighty acts of God. They are the record of God’s interpretation of his mighty acts in history. God called out a people that were not and made them his people. His words created the community. These imprimatur words (and reflection on these words) constitute Scripture.<sup>147</sup> In post-conservatism, all that people have are men’s views of what happened in history. Even in the midst of God’s breaking into history, the fullness of truth cannot be communicated with finite words.

Vanhoozer critiques the post-conservatives,

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 87; see *ibid.*, 122 where Achtemeier is cited favorably in this regard.

<sup>146</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 114; See also *ibid.*, 115. They also write, “Because they embody this foundational identity, these texts hold primary status at all stages in the life of the church. They function as ‘the constitution of an ongoing community,’ in that these texts provide the foundation (or what John Howard Yoder calls ‘the ground floor’) for Christian communal identity throughout history” (*ibid.*, 79).

The problem with nonfoundationalism is that the scripture has meaning only when it is read by such-and-such an interpretive community. My question, then, concerns the ability of the text to speak against and correct the interests and the interpretive strategies of a community. My epistemology and ecclesiology alike are fallibilist, for all human beliefs and practices are distorted by the fall, even Christian beliefs and church practices. That is precisely why we need a “norming norm” that is independent of our systems of beliefs and practices. But that is precisely what a nonfoundationalist approach disallows, if I have understood it correctly.<sup>148</sup>

In an ironic way, and given the predisposition to affirm the community, post-conservatives make the community the indubitable fact in theology. It replaces Scripture as the norming norm since all that people know comes *first* through a communal interpretive grid. So when one reads Scripture, she reads it primarily as a member of a specific community. Thus, its meaning is shaped by her interpretation, rather than Scripture critiquing her culture.<sup>149</sup>

### **Self-Attestation and Indubitable Authority**

All of these pieces needed to be assembled before theologians can address the larger picture of biblical authority as attested by Scripture, in response to post-conservatism. Given post-conservatism’s coherent model of truth, its embrace of postmodern anthropology, and the Spirit’s use of the community and the Bible, Grenz and Franke make a move that denies Scripture’s self-attested authority. They write plainly, “It is not the Bible as a book that is authoritative, but the Bible as the instrumentality of the Spirit; the biblical message spoken by the Spirit through the text is

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<sup>147</sup>This relationship between God’s word, his spokesmen, and the inscripturated words will be treated extensively in chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>148</sup>Vanhoozer, “Disputing about Words?” 199.

<sup>149</sup>See Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*, 108.

theology's norming norm."<sup>150</sup> The words of the Bible are not magical or world-forming in and of themselves. The words only give life if the Spirit energizes and illuminates them in order to give life.<sup>151</sup> Two problems consist in both of modernism's divergent children—liberal and conservative theological methodologies.<sup>152</sup> First, they both assume foundationalism's assumption of a universal point of reference (history of religions for liberals, and extrapolated propositions for conservatives). Second, they overlook any explanation as to *how* the Spirit addresses the contemporary culture.<sup>153</sup>

Scripture's authority does not lie in its self-witness to be the very words of God. Rather, since the community saw fit to decide its importance to the community and its primitive nature in the life of the church, it is, then, authoritative.<sup>154</sup> Is this an accurate account of how the community came to see the Bible as authoritative? Is there not an inherent authority that they saw in the words of the prophets and apostles? In an effort to retain the authority of Scripture and the post-conservative program he offers, Grenz states, "Of course, Scripture remains the primary source and norm for theological statements. Nevertheless, contextualization demands that the theologian take seriously the thought-forms and mindset of the culture in which theologizing transpires, in order to explicate the eternal truths of the Scriptures in language that is understandable to

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<sup>150</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 69.

<sup>151</sup>Grenz, *Created for Community*, 167.

<sup>152</sup>See discussion above, "A Different Interpretation of the Facts of History."

<sup>153</sup>Berry, "Revising Evangelical Theological Method," 84-85.

<sup>154</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 88.

contemporary people.”<sup>155</sup> To make clear, God spoke to men and women in history, but the words of Scripture are men’s reflections on God’s actions in history.

Further, given the affirmation that there are three sources for theology, Scripture loses its authority insofar that it must be interpreted from the plausibility structures of tradition and culture. If Scripture is the first source (implying there is a second and third) then how can it be the norming norm if it is merely *primary*. To call tradition and culture sources is very different than affirming what has been the case for generations of evangelicals—namely, they determine the reading of Scripture. Sources form the content of theology. Indeed, there is an inevitable influence from the community through which people are born and the culture in which they swim.<sup>156</sup>

Since Scripture is interpreted through history and culture, it has an equal voice to them—unable to be their norming norm. As Vanhoozer critiqued, in what way is Scripture to speak against culture if it is regulated by it? While Grenz seeks to avoid the charge of subjectivity (by redefining it as individual interpretation, eschewing the possibility for corporate subjectivity), he has to try and give various characteristics of the biblical narrative that would make it authoritative (rather than the *whole* of Scripture and each word that makes up its pages). He opts for Pannenberg’s explanation: “The authority of scripture rests on that of the gospel and its content—the saving presence of God in the person and history of Jesus Christ. Only insofar as they bear witness to this content do the

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>156</sup>See Alistair McGrath, “Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 139-58.

words and sayings of scripture have authority in the church. . . . How far this is true must be tested for each writing and each saying in each writing.”<sup>157</sup>

Is such an examination offered here merely a philosophical canon within a canon? Timothy Ward answers,

Since our only access to the gospel of Christ is through Scripture, it is hard to see how a principle of inner-canonical criticism can be discerned that is not arbitrary, being instead determined largely by our own tastes and prejudices. In other words the outcome of any process of ‘inner-canonical criticism’ is usually a pared-down Bible whose content accords suspiciously well with the insights, obsessions and neuroses of our culture, and is limited by our own (inevitably inadequate) spiritual experience of our own existence in Christ.<sup>158</sup>

One cannot help but think that due to Grenz’ inclination to read life through postmodernity that he is led to teach that community is the focal point of God’s redemptive actions.

RE definitely informs Grenz’ attempt to engage the culture-at-large with Scripture. Yet, is he employing such an epistemology in a faithful way as it has been conceived; or using re-defined aspects of it? Truly all people are enmeshed in community and culture. Christians are born into a new family of believers by the Spirit, who has given us his words. Rather than mounting proposition after proposition gleaned from natural theology, the Christian theologian is within his epistemic rights to presuppose the veracity of Scripture.

All such attempts to establish the role of Scripture in theology, whether or not they are successful, are ultimately unnecessary. In engaging in the theological task, we *may simply assume the authority of the Bible* on the basis of the integral relation of theology to the faith community. Because the Bible is the universally acknowledged

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<sup>157</sup>Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:463. See also his earlier affirmation of Goldingay and Bloesch. See also Stanley J. Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text,” *Theology Today* 57, no. 3 (2000): 358-59.

<sup>158</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 45.

book of the Christian church, the biblical message functions as the central norm for the systematic articulation of the faith of that community. Consequently, the divine nature of Scripture or its status vis-a-vis revelation need not be demonstrated in the prolegomenon to theology. Sufficient for launching the systematic-theological enterprise is the nature of theology itself a reflection on community faith. And sufficient for the employment of the Bible in this task is its status as the book of the community.<sup>159</sup>

The premise is true; yet post-conservatives' ground misplaces authority. Theologians do not presuppose the Bible merely because it has been the book of the church. They presuppose the truthfulness and authority of Scripture because of what it is ontologically. Since God has spoken to man—and it has been recorded—from whence else can authority be derived? Surely the community comes *under* the divine locutions of Scripture, not anointing them as such.

All of these presuppositions and explanations lead Grenz and Franke to make the bald statement: “The authority of scripture does not ultimately rest with any quality that inheres in the text itself but with the work of the Spirit who speaks in and through the text. Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. That is to say, the authority of the Bible is ultimately the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is.”<sup>160</sup> This denies the history of the Protestant Reformation that Calvin and Luther affirmed about Scripture. Wherein shall the believer go to refute the papal influence? He must run to the biblical testimony since it alone possesses divine authority. To deny authority that inheres in the text of Scripture is to deny what the Reformation

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<sup>159</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 94, emphasis original; also Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community*, 168.

<sup>160</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 114.

fought for—namely, the words of Scripture judge all interpretations of it.<sup>161</sup> One cannot separate Scripture from the Spirit. Post-conservatives’ use of speech-act theory dissects speech and the speaker so much that “Scripture” can exist outside of the Spirit’s speaking. As Knowles writes,

The bringing of the Bible and the Holy Spirit together provides the basis for understanding the Bible, which Grenz and Franke refer to as the *norming norm* in theology. Put like this, at first glance, the Bible could be understood to function as the ultimate and primary authority for evangelical theology. However, this is not the case. Put simply, developing an essentially neo-orthodox approach, the Bible on its own is not the ultimate authority for theology. (For Barth, the text of the Bible is a witness to revelation, no revelation itself.) *It is the Bible in tandem with the Holy Spirit speaking through it to the contemporary situation that constitutes the final authority. (This is clearly a move beyond Luther’s sola scriptura.)*<sup>162</sup>

Evangelicals have argued for a Bible that is an authority in itself because it is *the* written word of God (fully authoritative and infallible). Viewed in this way it is first-order and serves as the foundation for all theological reflection, which is second-order. This shift away from ‘first-order’ displays a Lindbeckian influence in post-conservative theology.

Again,

Grenz and Franke completely bypass the speech-acts available in scripture itself. . . . They have decided, knowingly or otherwise, to pass over the recorded speech-acts in the Bible (textually accessible) and instead focus upon the subjective speech-acts of what God (through the Holy Spirit) is saying today (textually inaccessible).<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Knowles writes, “Grenz’ view of scripture. . . is problematic when examined from an evangelical perspective. Grenz, influenced by Lindbeck, does not seem to see scripture as being ‘first-order’. Scripture is intertwined with the Christian interpretive framework. . . . What is first-order is not the Bible. The way the community interacts with scripture, culture and its context results in a distinctive first-order language with its symbols and explicitly Christian practices.” Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 166-67, 169.

<sup>162</sup>Knowles, *Beyond Evangelicalism*, 111; emphasis added.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 117.

Post-conservatism seems to present some confusion of terminology when speaking about the Spirit and his illumination and inspiration. They seem to oversimplify postmodernity to make it appear as primarily an ethos rather than a disassembling of modernism. Even more, they subsume Plantinga and Wolterstorff under the umbrella of nonfoundationalism—as opposed to chastened rationalism. Classic foundationalism is philosophically dead.

There is a resemblance between classic foundationalism and evangelical theology since classic foundationalism builds off assumptions of the biblical narrative. Further, theologians can trust their senses given the doctrine of the *imago Dei* grounded in the biblical narrative. To eschew the entire program is a mistake. People can tentatively know their world given their God-given mind to understand what their God-given senses perceive. God is transcendent. Yet he is just as immanent in Creation. While the finite can never contain the infinite, he is able to understand rightly insofar that God imparts truth to him. He may not be able to contain the ocean in his bucket, but he is able to get some of the ocean in it.

### **Conclusion**

In an effort to engage and appropriate the correctives of postmodernism, post-conservative theologians have denied that classic foundationalism is dead (along with indubitable certitudes). Particularly Grenz and Franke have used Pannenbergian coherentism (with its eschatological orientation) to argue for Christianity's viability. This

look to the future, where all knowledge will be true knowledge,<sup>164</sup> seek to make sense out of postmodernism's insistence on man's finitude and situatedness. So as to not fall into utter subjectivism, post-conservatives have affirmed the subjective aspect of Scripture's self-attestation (illumination), while denying the objective aspect (inspiration) traditionally held in Protestant theological method.

To explain this preference, Grenz and Franke have spoken about the need to re-affirm the Spirit's speaking *through* the text, and not merely indubitable propositions upon which the theologian can build. The community is situated as the arbiter for truth in the believer's theology. The location of authority in the community is a natural implication of an affirmation of the subjective aspect of self-attestation, while denying its objective aspect. This is done in order to assert the situatedness of the reader, as well as to deny subjectivism.

The community's subjective experience is distinct from the witness of the Bible itself. Both writer and reader are enmeshed in culture; however, universal truths can still be given, when given transcendentally. Crassly: Merely because someone is enmeshed in North American culture does not preclude his ability to state that  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Further, theologians must be careful that they not divorce the historical and cultural qualities of Scripture in order to build a classic foundation. The OT and NT assume that they are God's words to his people. Christians are to listen to every word, not just the ones "the Spirit appropriates"; for he, in essence, has appropriated every single word that

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<sup>164</sup>I am using the term "true" for the eschatological knowing as Grenz uses it. As will become evident, the proper, historical understanding of epistemology uses the terms archetypal knowledge (to refer to God's comprehensive knowledge) and ectypal knowledge (to refer to man's true knowledge as imparted by God in his Word and the *imago Dei*).

the biblical authors wrote.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup>Due to limited space, an engagement and defense of what is known as concursive theory of inspiration cannot be set forth here. Suffice it to say that God breathed out the words of Scripture through the author's personality and writing so that what the authors of Scripture write, God has written.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE OLD TESTAMENT PARADIGM OF YHWH'S WORD AND HIS PEOPLE

In the previous chapters historical and contemporary understandings of Scripture as theology's starting place was treated. Within post-conservatism's proposal was the denial of any inherent authority located in the Bible, (Scripture's self-attestation). Part of the claim was made due to their insistence that it is not Scripture itself, but it is the Spirit's utilization of Scripture that imbues it with authority. The Spirit speaking through the words of the text is the basis of authority.<sup>1</sup> By denying Scripture's self-witness, post-conservatism denies an essential aspect of historic Protestant theology.

These next two chapters will be a treatment of the *autopistia* of Scripture by looking at the OT and NT, respectively. What are Scripture's claims about its own words? This chapter will look at God's aseity—that he is the *source* of and *standard* for all things, especially theology. He *knows* all things, especially himself. He stands outside of man's fallen subjectivity yet is sovereignly immanent so that he can communicate in and through human language so that people might know and worship him. God's self-revelation is primarily communicated through his elect representatives, the prophets.

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<sup>1</sup>By attempting to bring the Spirit and Scripture together, they have ironically bifurcated the two. That is, Scripture does not exist apart from the Spirit for it is the very words of the Triune God. The Spirit is not rightly known save through Scripture. What is more, it is not merely the work of the Spirit, but the work of the Triune God. Therefore, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have spoken through the words of Scripture.

Therefore, this chapter will look at the prophetic office in the OT—how it is understood by the covenant people, how it is spoken about by God, how the prophets view themselves, how the words of God are not compromised in integrity or authority when man speaks them. These men and women were God’s spokespeople and it behooves the theologian, in light of the written testimony of God’s words and their self-authentication, to know what they have to say regarding the words they speak on behalf of God. This chapter will first elucidate the relationship of the *a se*, sovereign God to the created world, second, God’s perfect, archetypal knowledge of the facts of history, third, God’s self-communication of this knowledge to his creatures through his election of prophets to speak for him, and fourth, how the rest of the OT communicates God’s purposes for his world.

### ***Sui Generis*: “God as Standard in His World”**

From the beginning of the biblical narrative, it is clear that God existed before the world was created by his speaking. The six days of creation are each introduced with God’s speaking.<sup>2</sup> The Bible begins with the assumption of God’s existence. He is transcendent and distinct from creation. Yet he is intimately involved with every minute detail—for he sees the wickedness of all the earth and, yet, speaks to an individual (i.e., Noah). There is no elaborate explanation as to how we know that he exists. All things that were created were done so by his willing them to exist through his word. He has authority to create and to destroy according to the purposes of his will (Gen 18:22-33; Isa 45:1-7; Ps 24:1-2). Just as the potter has authority to do as he pleases with the clay, since it is his,

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<sup>2</sup>The imperfect jussive of יָדַבֵּר (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, and 26).

so also God can do with his creation as he pleases for he made it (Jer 18:4-6; Ps 95:5). Distinct from other ANE religions,<sup>3</sup> YHWH is not depicted as warring with other gods to gain a certain territory or jurisdiction (Deut 32:21, 39; 2 Sam 7:22; 2 Kgs 5:15). He stands alone (Exod 15:11; Deut 7:9; 2 Chr 6:14). He creates alone (Ps 135:5-21; Job 38:4-41). He is a speaking deity—to both animate and inanimate objects (Pss 29:5; 103:20-22; Job 38:12-13; Gen 15:1; Isa 66:1). *Ex nihilo* God created all that is by the power of his word (Gen 1:3, 6, 14). God's *fiat lux* is both a creative and powerful “performative of performatives.”<sup>4</sup>

As one looks across the Bible's storyline, it is clear that God's word is what calls Abraham out of paganism (redemption; Gen 12:1-4), gives his redeemed people contours by which they are to live by (ethics; Exod 20:1-17), and interprets the natural world so that God's people understand it rightly, though not exhaustively (purpose; Gen 1:14; Jer 10:2; Joel 2:30-31). No doubt is raised as to whether the creature must submit to the Creator's words. Indeed, creation owes its existence to God. Because God made all things, he owns all things (Ps 95:5; Deut 21:17; 32:9). If he has given life, he has the authority and right to take life (Exod 12:12, 29; Num 3:13; 8:17). In the creation account, God appoints the stars, the land, the plants, and animals to a particular purpose (Gen 1:14) as well as the man when he commands him to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:22). As Kline has observed, then, all things that are created are in a covenantal relationship

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<sup>3</sup>Note the difference between the Genesis account of creation and that of, say, the Gilgamesh epic. No duality of deities, one God who controls all things.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Hancher, “Performative Utterance, the Word of God, and the Death of the Author,” *Semeia* 41 (1988): 28. Hancher also says, “Divine fiats cannot be directives”; (ibid.)

with God.<sup>5</sup> Further, “When the Lord singled out Israel as His special people to be Lord over them in a peculiar way, He was not giving them an absolutely unique status; rather, He was calling them essentially into the status that all men occupy yet fail to acknowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

### **God’s Authority in His World**

William Barclay helpfully cites nine ways in which God possesses authority over his creation, seven of which will be summarized here:<sup>7</sup>

(1) God’s authority knows no natural boundaries. “In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also” (Ps 95:4).

(2) His authority knows no social boundaries. “The rich and the poor meet together, YHWH made all of them” (Prov 22:2; cf. Jer 16:6).

(3) His authority “demands a high degree of social consciousness and social justice.”<sup>8</sup> Isaiah and Ezekiel condemned the oppression of the poor by the wealthy Israelites. The one who oppresses the poor will be condemned to die (Ezek 18:12-13).

(4) God’s authority “will never accept cult instead of conduct.”<sup>9</sup> “Rend your hearts, not your garments” (Joel 2:13). “This is the one to whom I will look: the one who is humble and broken in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa 66:2).

(5) The authority of God extended over temple, shrine and priest.”<sup>10</sup> “Do not trust in these words: “The Temple of YHWH, The Temple of YHWH, The Temple of YHWH.” For if you truly change your ways and your works, if you truly execute justice for one another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods

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<sup>5</sup>Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 13.

<sup>7</sup>William Barclay, *By What Authority* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

to your own hurt, then I will dwell in this place” (Jer 7:4b-7a; cf. YHWH’s Spirit leaving the Temple in Ezek 10). YHWH is not bound to real estate, but chooses to bless by his presence. Unlike other ANE gods, he is not bribed, but demands ethics on his terms because he is the one who Redeemed Israel and has the right to demand obedience.

(6) God’s authority “permeates and pervades all life.”<sup>11</sup> This is made abundantly clear in the cleanliness codes in the Torah—secret nocturnal emissions to cursing one’s parents to what kind of food one can eat or not intermingle with. “So in the life which the authority of God would have men live, there is this all-pervading kindness and thoughtfulness, and the God who formed the earth and shaped the heavens and counts the number of the stars is the same God who cares that sanitary arrangements are made and kept and a house safely designed.”<sup>12</sup>

(7) God’s authority is an “eschatological authority.”<sup>13</sup> YHWH’s rule is not bound chronologically to a certain point in time when he freed Israel from the bondage in Egypt. But by virtue of his redemption, he has the right to make stipulations on their lives in a particular way. That is, he owns and determines all kingdoms (Dan 2:21; Prov 21:1), but with Israel he prescribes how his peculiar people are to live. Unfortunately, Barclay attempts to draw a sharp distinction between the prophets (who pertain to the authority of the Spirit) and the priests (who pertain to the authority of tradition).<sup>14</sup> This wedding of the offices can be seen in Jeremiah [who is a prophet, whose father is a priest (Jer 1:1); compare Ezekiel, who is a prophet and priest (Ezek 1:3)]. From the institution of the prophets (Moses as primogenitor) and the priests (Aaron as primogenitor), God intended for the two roles to inform and strengthen each other.

As Frame helpfully summarizes the quality of this covenant headship of God:

“If God is covenant *head*, then He is exalted above His people; He is transcendent. If He is *covenant* head, then He is deeply involved with them; He is immanent.”<sup>15</sup> What is more, the biblical concept of God’s transcendence means that God is in control of all that

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>15</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 13.

comes to pass in his creation.<sup>16</sup> This is why YHWH's command to Pharaoh must be obeyed, because he is Pharaoh's God (though not worshiped by him). This is why YHWH can take the lives of the firstborn, because he has given them life. This is why he can bequeath the land of the Canaanites to Israel, because it is truly his land. This is why he can direct Cyrus to do his bidding by taking captive Israel (Isa 45:1); and then incite Artaxerxes to permit Israel to return once the land has received its sabbath (Neh 2:1).

How does man know what God requires of him? Fallen man can know with certainty what God's will is for him because God has spoken to him; the Bible portrays a picture of God's "covenant solidarity."<sup>17</sup> "God is not a vague abstract principle or force but a living person who fellowships with His people. He is the living and true God, as opposed to all the deaf and dumb idols of this world. Knowledge of Him, therefore, is also a person-to-person knowledge."<sup>18</sup> Frame shapes his understanding of God's transcendence and immanence with the triad of control, authority, and personal presence. He writes,

Control involves presence, for God's power is so pervasive that it brings us face to face with Him in every experience. Authority involves control, for God's commands presuppose His full ability to enforce them. Authority involves presence, for God's commands are clearly revealed and are the means by which God acts in our midst to bless and curse. Presence involves control, lest anything in heaven or earth should keep us from God or Him from us (John 10; Rom. 8). Presence involves authority, for God is never present apart from His Word (cf. Deut. 30:11ff.; John 1:1ff.; etc).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 129-34.

<sup>17</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

Since God is Lord over all creation, especially humans, he is able to explain clearly using both verbal and non-verbal communication what his will for man is. He stands over culture, but speaks through it. He is not hindered by finite language. Since language is amoral, speech by his representatives is not inherently sin-filled. Nor, because he is transcendent, is finite language confined to a specific time and space necessarily.<sup>20</sup> As Frame has written,

A Christian epistemology will reject the premise that human language necessarily refers primarily to finite reality, because this premise is based on what we have called a non-Christian view of transcendence—that God is not clearly revealed in creation. On a Christian basis we must say that God made human language for His own purposes, the chief of which was to relate to himself. Human language is (perhaps even chiefly, or “primarily”) a medium by which we can talk to one another about God.<sup>21</sup>

### **God’s World and the World’s God**

How is God’s authority communicated to his creatures? The difference between YHWH and other ANE gods, is that he reveals his will to people (2 Sam 7:22-29; cf. Ezra 10:11). God chose to speak to his people directly (Deut 5:24-26); but due to their fear he chose Moses as his intermediary (Deut 5:27). YHWH entered into an objective and specified covenant with his people. He provided a constitution for them.

The constitution he made with the people was starkly different than modern conceptions of a constitution. Informed by the suzerain-vassal covenants, God set forth the stipulations for the people. The people did not negotiate or determine what would bind them to each other and to God. It was not a democratic, communal decision. God, by

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<sup>20</sup>That is, if there is a temporal nature to his speech-acts, those governors would be apparent in the communication itself. Typology is in view here, primarily.

<sup>21</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 35.

divine right, spoke and required obedience. This is very different than the concept of constitution set forth by post-conservatives who want to say that the people of God determined when the Spirit spoke through the text.<sup>22</sup> There was to be no adjudication as to whether God was speaking through these particular texts in the canon.<sup>23</sup> Rather, God spoke; his representative wrote the words down for posterity—as those who were far off could attest what YHWH’s will is in various matters. “God himself has ordained that these written words serve as the constitution of his church.”<sup>24</sup>

Given God’s transcendence over time and history, and given man’s embeddedness in time and history, the inscripturation of God’s word to his people was inevitable. “In one sense, the written document is actually weightier than the oral messages of the prophets. . . . It governs Israel long after the prophets have gone.”<sup>25</sup> Since it serves as the perpetual constitution of his people, there is particular content that his people are to know. This does not come in the form of mere coherence—only tentatively grasped until the *eschaton*. Certainly there are interpretations of the text that require tempering, but the inscripturated words of God should not be diverted in strength because they were given at a particular time and space. Frame, again, is helpful here:

The covenant is propositional. It is a document containing words and sentences. It functions as a legal constitution for God’s people. It is to be kept, passed on, from generation to generation (Deut. 6:4ff.; Jude 3). It contains information about God’s

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<sup>22</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 125; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 114, 150.

<sup>23</sup>Sure, Israel was to determine whether a prophet was a true prophet sent by YHWH (discussed below), but once the covenant community had received the authoritative, written texts by his prophets, they were to merely obey.

<sup>24</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 102.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

name, his mighty deeds, his will for our lives, his sanctions, and his established institutions. In the light of the covenant model, surely the burden of proof is on modern theologians to tell us why we must place personal and propositional revelation in sharp opposition to each other.<sup>26</sup>

In light of this covenantal structure exhibited in Scripture, the relationship between God's words and God's deeds is not as disparate as some might project (i.e., post-conservatives and Barth).<sup>27</sup> The document itself (as mediated through the prophets and apostles) relays God's acts in God's interpretation (as mentioned above regarding the Exodus event). "Scripture is a narrative about God's kingdom, but it is not *merely* that. It is God's own account of that kingdom, and it is that kingdom's written constitution."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the fact that Scripture is to be adhered to for the remainder of this fallen world for succeeding generations, it is more plausible that they would have to be given from God's "temporal omnipresent"<sup>29</sup> vantage point. That is, God is both fully present in the present and transcendent to history so that he can tell the end from the beginning. In order to produce his covenantal document for his people, he oversaw the entire process by which it came to pass. God not only prepared the letters written by Paul, he prepared a Paul (his birth, family, learning, and conversion) to write those letters.<sup>30</sup> Plenary verbal inspiration is not dictation theory—so that human personality is swallowed up by mechanistic scribes. God is Lord over history and Lord over Scripture's authors and their histories.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 153-54.

<sup>27</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 90; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 16, 94; Karl Barth, *CD* 4.1 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 34-67, 137-44; idem, *CD* 1.2 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1-16.

<sup>28</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 344.

<sup>29</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 557-59.

<sup>30</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 155.

Since God's produced a covenantal document,<sup>31</sup> he superintended its production and preservation. In contrast to Pannenbergian futurism, "we should seek to answer theological questions multiperspectively, both from the standpoint of the future and from the standpoints of the past and the present. . . . If God is not an 'existent being acting with omnipotence and omniscience' in the present, but one who is coming to be in the future, then it is simply the case that in the world as we know it God does not exist."<sup>32</sup> If God, however, is transcendent and immanent (so that he can move history at his will) then it is plausible and probable that he will speak and act so that he will bring his will to pass. His present speaking, and carrying men along so as to write what he desires, is in complete accord with his eschatological actions. God speaks and appoints men to impart and record his words in order to fulfill his purposes of the redemption of people. As Vanhoozer has pointed out, Scripture serves as the script whereby fallen men may fulfill God's will to redeem his creation.<sup>33</sup> Since salvation is at stake, getting redemption right cannot be approximated but must be accurate to the literal "t."

### **Uncertainty of God's Word Is Disobedience**

When God placed Adam in the Garden, he did not leave him to interpret the beautiful fruit and his purpose for being in the Garden—to tend and keep the Garden (Gen 2:15). YHWH told him that he could eat of any of the trees, save one (Gen 2:9; 16-

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<sup>31</sup>See Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 35-60.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 575.

<sup>33</sup>See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 216-42.

17). “God never intended man to attend to natural revelation while ignoring His spoken word.”<sup>34</sup>

The first affront to God’s words comes in Genesis 3 where the crafty serpent causes doubt as to whether God really did say that they must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. His appeal is not that they not heed God’s words (at least at first), but he questions what God had actually said—the assumption is that they should heed his words; the doubt comes as to what he actually commanded. The serpent then moves to charge God with lying—“You will not surely die” (Gen 3:4ff.). As a result, the woman heeds the serpent’s voice (Gen 3:11) and the the man obeys the woman’s voice (Gen 3:17). God’s commands are clear and certain, and they are not to be questioned; thus he banishes the couple from paradise (as he clearly told them what the consequences would be).

Not only does he have the authority to banish the first people from the Garden, but, since he is Lord over *all* creation, he is able to command a flood to clean the *entire* earth from its sin (Gen 6:1-7). The Bible presents God, not as a disconnected deity, but as a omnipresent, omni-intimate being who communicates his purposes with chosen individuals.<sup>35</sup> He tells Noah that he will destroy the earth—save Noah’s family (Gen 6:16-18). He gives him detailed architectural plans for constructing the ark (Gen 6:14-16). He calls Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and promises that he will give land and offspring to him (Gen 12:1-5). God singles him out and gives this insignificant pagan a

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<sup>34</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 144.

<sup>35</sup>Throughout the biblical account, YHWH is shown to be king over all the earth. Unlike other ANE accounts, YHWH is not sovereign over a particular territory. For example, see the Treaty of Mursilis, who is king over the Hatti land (“Treaty of Mursilis,” trans. A Goetze, *ANET*, 203).

purpose with world-encompassing implications.<sup>36</sup> If anyone blesses Abraham, God will bless him. If anyone curses him, he will be cursed (Gen 12:1-3; cf. 14:18-20). How could any deity make such audacious claims if he did not have authority to fulfill his words? It is with reference to this supreme deity alone that righteousness can be gained; one's relationship to Ba'al or Chemosh or Ashterah does not guarantee righteousness.

He is with Joseph (Gen 39:2, 21) and reveals his purposes in dreams (Gen 37:5, 9). "The pattern of relationship between God's saving works and revelatory words is that prophecy comes first, then the mighty, redemptive act, then further verbal revelation to interpret the act."<sup>37</sup> Although Pharaoh is Egypt's incarnated deity, he is clueless when it comes to what his own dreams mean. Only God owns the interpretations to dreams (Gen 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28). It is not just that God interprets the dreams, but he is the one to whom all are subject. He has fixed the future and graciously decided to reveal it to Pharaoh through Joseph (Gen 41:32). Pharaoh surmises that God has placed his Spirit within Joseph to interpret dreams and understand the future (Gen 41:38-39).<sup>38</sup> Joseph is not to be confused with God. He is, rather, God's representative to the world. God fixes history and does as he pleases; and he reveals that will and work to humans through his Spirit to whomever he chooses. In this way, Scripture presents God as sovereign over seemingly insignificant details (the future of a pagan cupbearer and baker) as well as massive futures (Egyptian famine that would assuredly affect all people). What

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<sup>36</sup>Note that from this one ethnic clan, God made this geographically-specific people unbound in its importance. What this man does matters for the entire cosmos. In this way, God has always acted through the particulars of history.

<sup>37</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 144.

is more, God is in control of history and human decisions. Even the seemingly wicked intent of Joseph's jealous siblings was intended by God for their own preservation. He sought to preserve a remnant in order to fulfill his promise to Abraham (Gen 45:4-15). The concluding note to Genesis is that even jealousy and pride must succumb to God's purposes in the world. Although the brothers intended to harm Joseph, God superintended their wrath for their own good (Gen 50:19-21). Throughout the book of Genesis, the reader is presented with a picture of God over all. His authority has no limits. When he speaks, the hearer must obey. There is no treatise offered that these really are God's words. From the beginning they are presented as such. Though a man may kick against God's intentions, he will not win.

### **God's Perfect and Comprehensive Knowledge Communicated to His Covenant People**

As God's perfect and exhaustive self-knowledge is communicated through imperfect and finite prophets to his fallen creatures he purposed to commit his self-revelation to writing. Does the written text have any less authority than the spoken word—as the OT understands it? Additionally, Scripture speaks about its own authority within the covenant community, uttered by God's own mouth; thus it testifies to its own authority. Inferentially, this explains how the words contained in the OT canon came to be considered God's words in the beginning.<sup>39</sup> As God's Spirit borne along the prophets

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<sup>38</sup>Notice the relationship between God's revelation and man's reception. God's Spirit is the medium by which his will is made known.

<sup>39</sup>The question how the OT was perceived is of utmost importance to the discussion of its self-attesting character. For in its perception—both within the biblical narrative and in the covenant community—we can gain insight into how the community received the canon as God's words, by virtue of

to communicate God's words, God's people were expected to submit to that all-authoritative word (spoken and written).

There is no higher authority than the one, true God who has graciously revealed himself. We need not go outside of what he has told us in order to verify if what he says is true. Those who sought to go to others to verify or test a prophet's words were punished (1 Kgs 22; 2 Kgs 3:1-20).<sup>40</sup> YHWH created the world, he has the best perspective by which we are to view ourselves and others. Rather than citing passage after passage where Scripture speaks about how trustworthy God's words are, the argument henceforth will seek to show how God elects and empowers individuals to speak for him.<sup>41</sup> He endows them with power and authority to speak authoritative words. When they speak, people are to listen for it is God speaking directly to them. This is the biblical picture of why Scripture is considered God's words.

Certainly, the Bible says that the commands given at Sinai were written by the very finger of God. Yet, all sixty-six books of the Christian canon are not said to have been physically etched by God. Rather, and as will be explained in the following chapters, God's people revere his spokesmen so that what they say is authoritative for them and succeeding generations. The authorization of God's spokesmen by God (with signs and wonders or with verbal affirmation in the presence of others) is the bridge that

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its own witness. See Sigmund O. Mowinckel, *The Old Testament as Word of God*, trans. Reidar B. Bjornard (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 10.

<sup>40</sup>Note that Ahab and Jehoshaphat knew that their four hundred prophets were not appointed by God for they deliberately search for Micaiah—whom they know the Lord has called. In the narrative, they have prophets, but it is only Micaiah who is a “prophet to YHWH” (נְבִיא לַיהוָה; 1 Kgs 22:7). The same construct is used of Elisha in 2 Kgs 3:11.

connects the words of God with the words of men. God does not expect his people to obey his written commands because they are philosophically objective *principia*. He expects them to listen to him. He expects them to obey his representatives as the means by which they obey him. Knowledge of God and his commands is “a person-to-person knowledge. God’s presence is not something that we discover through refined theoretical intelligence. Rather, God is unavoidably close to His creation. We are involved with him all the time.”<sup>42</sup> In light of this, “Because God is ‘simple,’ His thoughts are always self-expression.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, “God’s thoughts are the originals of which ours, at best, are only copies, images. Our thoughts, therefore, would not exist apart from God covenantal presence.”<sup>44</sup>

Mowinckel, like many others, have taught that biblical inspiration looks much like what 2 Esdras 14:37ff teaches.<sup>45</sup> “‘Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you to drink.’ Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a full cup was offered to me. . . . I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory; and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed.” God causes his spirit to dwell within man (in the case of 2 Esdr, five men) in order to speak forth wisdom.

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<sup>41</sup>While this can be helpful, it is the conviction of this author that the varied verses that can be offered must first be set within the biblical framework for why God’s people can trust and must submit to these verses.

<sup>42</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 17.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>45</sup>Technically speaking: the means by which the words of Scripture are obtained and given.

Ezekiel was commanded to eat a scroll, go, and speak to Israel (Ezek 3:1). The scroll represented God's words to his people. The Apostle John was commanded the same command in Revelation 10. Both instances indicate that God's words existed outside of the spokesmen, were consumed by them (thereby becoming part of them), and they were entrusted to share that message with God's covenant people. Jeremiah's mouth was touched, and YHWH's words were put in his mouth (Jer 1:9). This is reminiscent of Isaiah's call in Isaiah 6, where his mouth is cleansed so that he will then go out and proclaim God's message. Isaiah shows us that YHWH graciously chooses sinful men to carry his pure and holy message to his people. YHWH could have spoken from a mountain for the people to hear, but he chose the human vessel to bear his word for him.<sup>46</sup> What will come to light in this chapter is the link between the author's words, his representative office for God, and the Spirit's giving of wisdom to empower him to write. Such an interconnectedness of these three elements affirms the subjective and objective elements present in Scripture's self-witness. All the while, God anoints the authors to speak authoritatively as his physical representatives on earth. They are not merely mouthpieces (i.e., dictation theory), but are persons who imbue the divine words with their own personality, while communicating God's words and purposes to his creation.

Where Mowinckel and others go awry in their assessment is to conclude that the church developed the idea of inspiration and God's authoritative word over time.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Even if he had spoken from the mountain, the people still would have needed an intermediary (see Exod 20:18-21).

<sup>47</sup>Mowinckel, *The Old Testament*, 11. Further, the author makes the assessment that the Bible errs when it "contains many statements of historical, geographical, chronological, and biological nature . . . that simply cannot be harmonized with the present stage of our knowledge, statements which, therefore, to that extent are *erroneous*." Ibid., 13; emphasis original. He cites the age of the earth in the Bible seeming to

The sovereign God spoke to his creation from the beginning and expected it to obey. This is before *and* after the Fall (Gen 2:16-17; 4:8-12). No defense or treatise as to whether they should listen was necessary. God speaks and creation must obey. When humans do not obey, they are punished. There is no court of appeals. The Judge of all the earth issues his verdict over his creatures (Gen 6:5-8). This chapter will evaluate how the OT speaks about its authority by explicating and arguing that God's election of representatives formed the foundation for confidence that what they spoke and wrote were God's words to his people.

### **The Spirit in the World**

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, post-conservatives warn contemporary theology of limiting God's movements to time and space. He is infinite and should not be contained in the pages of a book. Indeed, he can speak through culture. In the following section we will look at how manifested his mediated presence through his prophets—in order to interact with creation. Before that discussion, however, the

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explain a young earth (creation taking place around four thousand years before Christ), when there is archaeological evidence of high civilizations existing in Babylonia, China, and India 4000 BCE. Further, there seems to be a discrepancy between who sacked Samaria in 722 BCE. Was it Assyrian King Shalmaneser V, or was it Sargon II (according to Assyrian documentation)—Shalmaneser's successor? What about the hare being listed as an animal with split hoof and chewing the cud? This does not correlate to reality. As a result, Mowinckel believes: "It is not necessary, however, to hinge upon such details." *Ibid.*, 14. Thus, Scripture equals the Israelite-Jewish way of speaking of the divine and ethics. In this way it is a human book in the history of religions. There are other important points of apology that need to be addressed by Mowinckel, but this dissertation will not defend inerrancy. Though an important topic (and presupposition of this author) it cannot be dealt with here in detail. Suffice it to say, that I am in agreement with Mowinckel that Scripture is "not a homogenous entity with everything in one plane and in complete harmony." *Ibid.*, 16. While Scripture is not a monolithic book, this does not mean, however, that its supposed errors are, in fact, errors. Much like Grenz and Franke (and as will be seen later, Plantinga) one must *begin* with the community of faith in order to accept Scripture as God's word (*Ibid.*, 21-22). This runs counter to how this dissertation is structured—so that God's word, on its own, is sufficient to speak authoritatively from God to his people.

relationship between God's Spirit and his world, particularly as he inspired the biblical text is needed.

Much of what is espoused by post-conservatives (Scripture being that which the community recognizes as the Spirit speaking through the text) has been dubbed as Barthian. This is a fair critique as Barth sought to unfetter God by identifying him as wholly other than his text.<sup>48</sup> This author believes that a covenantal framework allows theology to affirm God's transcendence and immanence as pertains to the world (and the Scripture). It is God's sovereignty, not his hiddenness (or eschatological revelation of himself) that "keeps us from controlling him."<sup>49</sup> Again, "The Lord of Scripture is not wholly hidden. He is knowable and known to all through nature, and his revelation in Scripture is perfectly adequate to its purpose. . . . Scripture tells us that God is the ultimate controller, and that we are his possession, not the other way around."<sup>50</sup> He speaks to Adam (Gen 1:28-30). He appeared to Noah (Gen 6:13; Acts 7:44) and made promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The written record of YHWH's covenant served as directive for Josiah's reforms (2 Kgs 23). Even the rain and food man receives are witness to God's goodness to men (Acts 14:17).

Barth argued, similarly to post-conservatives, that human language is incapable of transcending time and space.<sup>51</sup> It is bound by time, and man is infected with sin.

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<sup>48</sup>Indeed, in correspondence with one of its proponents, he claimed that he would call himself a postmodern Barthian. This means, to him, that he would claim cultural impediments for Scripture rather than their containing error (i.e., phenomenological language of the corners of the earth, etc.).

<sup>49</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 112.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>51</sup>Barth, *CD* 2.1, 210; 3.1, 379; 4.3, 118; George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 45-49.

Therefore, to speak truly of God is impossible for man. It is impossible for man to speak about God. Yet, Scripture claims that God speaks about himself truly through fallen, finite men without any admixture of their sin and finitude so that God says what his representatives say. He reveals himself, not merely through acts, but also through interpretive speech-acts. Post-conservatives have borrowed Barthian metaphysics<sup>52</sup> as well as Derridian deconstruction.<sup>53</sup>

While it may appear that post-conservatives have not swallowed the entire plan of Derridian hermeneutics, they have affirmed quintessential parts of his programme. The Spirit cannot be contained by the Scripture (Barth), nor can the Scripture be understood outside of cultural cues and embedded-ness. Derrida calls this cultural embedded-ness “writing.” We are slaves to the mediation of signs (i.e., interpretation). Superior understanding is unmediated (i.e., intuition). “‘Writing’ is what we have *instead of* presence.”<sup>54</sup> There is no such thing as transcendent communication. “To believe in transcendence—that marks stand in for, or refer to, a reality above the play of language—is to fall under the illusion of the reliability of the sign.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>See “A Different Interpretation of the Facts of History” in the previous chapter.

<sup>53</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10-26, 255-68; idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 52-62. While there is not a direct link, they have borrowed from his denigration of signifier and writing. That is, according to post-conservatives writing is only important insofar that it has been appropriated by the Spirit. They have minimized the objectivity of the writing and that to which it signifies—namely, God.

<sup>54</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 62; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158; idem, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 264.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

This is contrary to the scriptural teaching of God's mediated presence being no less real (and the hearer/reader being no less accountable) than unmediated presence. Such talk of Jesus' physical presence being better than the apostles' experience of him *after* the Resurrection stands in opposition to Jesus' own words in John 16:7—"It is better (συνφέρεται) for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come for you." What is more, the Paraclete's ministry will be even more pervasive than the Son's. For he will convict people of their unbelief (John 16:8; something Jesus merely observed; John 16:9; cf. John 6:63). The presence of the Spirit is similar to his origin and authority as Jesus (from the Father; John 15:26; 16:13 respectively). This is the same Spirit who inspired David to write canonical Scripture (Mark 12:36). He is the same Spirit who anointed Jesus and made redemption possible (Luke 3:22; 4:1; 14-18; 10:21; 12:10). He also would empower the apostles to declare the evangelium without taint of falsity or finite limitations (Luke 12:12; John 14:26). The Spirit, then, is not a third-rate substitute for the presence of God. His mediated presence was God's intention since the prophet train in the OT (Joel 2; Acts 2). Scripture prescribes any interaction with the holy be mediated (Exod 20:19; 28:1-35; Lev 16). This mediation does not impugn the revelation as being anything less than true and authoritative (Josh 1:6-9, 16-19). By prioritizing the hiddenness of God and the in-scalable finitude of man (as post-conservatives have done), Scripture atrophies as the authoritative text. As Vanhoozer helpfully summarizes,

Without the author to serve as touchstone of the distinction between meaning and significance, every interpretation becomes just as authorized a version as another. A text that cannot be set over against its commentary is no authority at all. Finally, biblical authority is undermined by the instability of meaning because, if nothing specific is said, the text cannot call for any specific response. Interpreters can give

neither obedience nor belief to texts that lack specificity. If there is no meaning in the text, then there is nothing to which the reader can be held accountable.<sup>56</sup>

### **As YHWH Commanded and Men Wrote: The God-Scripture Relationship**

YHWH's purpose is abundantly evident in the book of Exodus. In fact, there is a shift in how God relates to the patriarchs and how he relates to his chosen race—Israel. Through the person of Moses, God works salvation on behalf of his people. As the Pentateuch progresses, YHWH and his representative overlap in their actions towards Israel. That is, the appointed actor (Moses) resembles the divine actor as Israel wanders through the wilderness and arrives at the banks of the Jordan River.

An analysis of the phrase *wayommer Adonai*<sup>57</sup> shows the highest concentration in the book of Exodus. The Israelites are forced into Egyptian servitude and cry out to the God of their ancestors for deliverance. God appears to Moses in the image of a burning bush in chapter 3 letting him know that he has heard their cries and is readying himself to answer with deliverance. YHWH calls Moses out from the flocks in order to go and tell Pharaoh (the Egyptian God-King) to let the Israelites go free. He identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—all three of which he had entered into covenant. Prior to this revelation, events could be interpreted as being performed by God [the blessing of the midwives (Exod 1: 20-21)], but at Mount Horeb there is no

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>57</sup>A search was done including the generic name for God (El and its derivatives).

misinterpretation because God verbally and visually reveals himself to Moses.<sup>58</sup> Moses is to present himself to Pharaoh in the name and authority of YHWH. Immediately he is commanded to gather the elders of Israel together and speak in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:13-18). YHWH will act supremely over the gods of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (3:17; 34:10-17). There is no tribal deity that can stand in the way of YHWH fulfilling his long-awaited promise to Abraham.

### **Signs of Authority**

While YHWH has graciously condescended to reveal his purposes to Moses, his delegate is apprehensive because he needs to produce some kind of verification that this visitation actually occurred.<sup>59</sup> There are two important elements to consider relating to the authority of God's words and authentication. The first element is the signs that accompany the spoken words. Moses does not expect people to merely take his word for it, but expects that people will demand some kind of justification that he should be listened to. What kind of justification is given? The Lord turns Moses' staff into a serpent "that they may believe that YHWH, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to [Moses]" (Exod 4:5). What is more, YHWH gives him a second sign (a leprous hand given that is healed; 4:6-7). Further, YHWH gives him a third sign of water turned to blood (4:8-9). There is no community

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<sup>58</sup>Note that Exodus equates the theophanic vision with the image of God. Exod 3:6b concludes: "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." This will be important later in this chapter as Moses is equated with the image of God to the people.

<sup>59</sup>See also Gleason L. Archer, "The Witness of the Bible to Its Own Inerrancy," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 89-91.

for Moses to appeal to as justification (i.e., the congregation). There is no earthly authority to whom he can appeal (i.e., bishops or elders). There is no written word he can appeal to as authoritative revelation (i.e., Scripture). There is only the apparition of YHWH to him, and the sign given to authenticate his words. All three signs are given so that the people will listen to Moses' voice when he speaks (4:9; cf. 10:1-2).

Moses then becomes concerned about his eloquence. Sure they may listen to his voice, but what if he cannot utter the words God gives him. God's anger is kindled against Moses and his response is illustrative to how God relates to his representative. The analogy is seen in Moses' relationship to his spokesman Aaron. God says: "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs" (4:15-16).<sup>60</sup> This is the foil to which all the verbal interactions between God, Moses, and Aaron to Pharaoh and Israel must be read for the remainder of Exodus (indeed, the Pentateuch). "Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do" (4:28). After the words had been communicated to Aaron, the brothers obeyed YHWH and gathered the elders. Who spoke? "Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people" (4:30). The signs and words coexist. As a result of hearing and seeing, the people believe (4:31).

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<sup>60</sup>What is amazing about this interaction is (1) God's use of a mediator to speak to his people (he could have revealed himself from the outset rather than sending a representative); and (2) God's condescension to give signs to the people to authenticate his/Moses' words. In other words, the latter is a gracious acceptance of man's need for authentication. He does not expect people to succumb to fideism.

Moses and Aaron go to Egypt's divine king and command him to let YHWH's people go. Pharaoh responds: "Who is YHWH, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know YHWH, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (Exod 5:2). Pharaoh increases Israel's workload; and Moses cries out to YHWH: "I came to speak to Pharaoh in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all" (5:23). In this way, a second element becomes pertinent to the discussion of God's words and authentication—*speaking in the name of the sender*.

YHWH reiterates who he is (by giving his name) and foretells all that will happen to Pharaoh and Israel.

I am YHWH, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am YHWH, your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am YHWH. (Exod 6:6-8; cf. 6:13, 29)

Three times, YHWH tells them his name and explicates what he will do—and the means by which he will do it.

God explained how Moses and Aaron were to relate to each other, he also explains how Moses is to relate to pagan Pharaoh: "I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. . . . The Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them" (Exod 7:1, 5). The refrain that rings throughout the rest of the Exodus narrative begins in 7:10—Moses and Aaron "did just as

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Rather, he gives signs to verify his revelation. As will be seen in the biblical narrative, the authentication of

YHWH commanded.” Ten plagues ensue that are escalate in such a way that Pharaoh commands the Israelites to leave. Each of the plagues (as already seen) serve to hallow YHWH’s name in the midst of Egypt and Israel. Even the divine king falls under the sovereign control of YHWH: “For this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (Exod 9:16). Pharaoh continued to be chastised because he did not fear and obey the word of YHWH (in contradistinction from Moses).<sup>61</sup>

YHWH is presented in Scripture as the king over all the earth (Exod 9:29). Pharaoh has no ownership of Egypt. It is on loan to him. He is expected to give obeisance to YHWH—even though he is not a member of the Abrahamic covenant. All gods are subservient to YHWH—not just Pharaoh.<sup>62</sup>

### **Every Word? Authority and Inscripturation**

As mentioned above, the echoing refrain of Exodus is that Moses did all that YHWH commanded. “You [Moses] shall speak all that I [YHWH] command you” (Exod 7:2). “So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him” (Exod 19:7). At first glance, it appears that the

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signs goes hand in hand with God’s chosen representative to the people.

<sup>61</sup>See Exod 9:20-21: “Whoever feared the word of YHWH among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of YHWH left his slaves and his livestock in the field.” Those who heeded his words saved their lives, those who disobeyed perished. Contrast 9:29-30.

<sup>62</sup>YHWH says: “I will pass through the land of Egypt . . . and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; *and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments*: I am YHWH” (Exod 12:12). While this says he will execute judgment on all the gods of Egypt, this must be read in the context of what preceded in Exod 3:17.

Bible portrays a dictation theory of inspiration. All the words that YHWH spoke to Moses were to be relayed to Israel.

The Bible, however, does not present a static view of inspiration<sup>63</sup>—as though God’s words were wholly other than man’s experience. Golden tablets did not drop from the sky. Moses went up a mountain and came down to the people. Once in the midst of the people, YHWH continued to direct his people as he met with Moses in the Tabernacle. That is, God speaks to Moses and Aaron and they relay the message YHWH has for his people. A keen example of this is found following YHWH’s institution of the Passover (Exod 12:43-51). Verse 50 says: “All the people of Israel did just as YHWH commanded Moses and Aaron.” If all that Moses and Aaron were meant to do was recite what YHWH told them to tell the people then this should be the way Scripture presents Moses’ commands to the people.<sup>64</sup>

A different picture is presented in chapter 13. Following YHWH’s institution of the Passover, 13:3 says: “Then Moses said to the people . . .” What follows is not a verbatim recitation of what YHWH had said in the prior verses. Instead, Moses elaborates and given argument to the command given by YHWH. He rehashes the authority YHWH possesses over the people (because he had redeemed Israel out of the Egyptian slavehouses). He then foretells what they are to do—YHWH will bring them to

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<sup>63</sup>The inspired Bible contains narrative, law code, poetry, proverbs, apocalypse, prophecy.

<sup>64</sup>This is not to negate that there is any dictation in view in the OT. It is clear that God’s representatives do recite word-for-word what YHWH commands them to speak—see Exod 4:15, 28, 30; 19:7-8; 24:4; Num 22:38; 23:5, 16; Deut 9:10; 18:18; 2 Sam 7:17; 14:3, 19; Isa 51:16; 59:21; Jer 1:9.

the land of the Canaanites<sup>65</sup> (albeit based on God's prior revelation in chapter 7). He then commands them to teach their progeny the reason for the Passover celebration.

The freedom by which Moses communicates YHWH's message to the people continues to grow as Moses' is endowed with more authority—through further signs and wonders. It is clear that God uses means to communicate his message of redemption to Egypt and Israel. He commands Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea (Exod 14:26-31). Moses did not split the waters, but God sanctified Moses in order to lead his people. Through a visual image, God distinguishes Moses from the other heads of households in Israel. As a result of this imagery, “the people feared YHWH, and they believed in YHWH and in his servant Moses” (v. 31).

### **The Mosaic Train of Appropriated Authority**

The words that Moses shares with the people is expected to be heeded by the people (Exod 23:21-22; Num 27:20; Deut 11:13, 28; 12:28). For in revealing YHWH's Law, Israel is able to know YHWH.<sup>66</sup> The Bible does not defend the words recorded as though someone might rebut that they are not God's words. The assumption throughout is that the God who redeemed Israel has chosen Moses and Aaron to speak for him. “If you heed the voice of YHWH your God, all of his commandments, which I am commanding you” (Deut 13:18). “If you will surely heed [אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע] the voice of YHWH your God, to heed in order to do all this commandment which I, myself, command you today” (Deut 15:5). YHWH commands and Moses commands. What God says, Moses says.

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<sup>65</sup>According to his spoken promise—cf. Exod 13:11.

What Moses says, God says. As the narrative progresses, the words of Moses are to be heeded by the people—as he is YHWH’s representative (Exod 8:13; 32:28; 38:21; Lev 10:7; Deut 31:1, 24). He essentially becomes the incarnation of YHWH for the people. He judges them (Exod 18:13). He commands them (Exod 16:24; 36:6; Lev 8:36). He works miracles for them (Exod 17:5-6). They grumble against him (Num 17:5; 27:14).

One example of this transference of authority can be readily seen in Exodus 15. Following Moses’ song of deliverance, the people begin to grumble against him<sup>67</sup> because there is no water to drink. Moses cries out to YHWH as to what he should do. YHWH shows him a tree log. Moses decides to throw the log into the water; the water subsequently becomes sweet. In the following verse, however, the narrative begins to blur so that the reader is not sure who the referent is. The Hebrew says, “There he made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, ‘If you will diligently listen to the voice of YHWH your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am YHWH, your healer’” (Exod 15:25b-26). There is no introductory formula (i.e., “The Lord commanded/said to Moses. . .”). Moses speaks, and yet YHWH also speaks.

The narrative goes on to transfer authoritative power to Moses when Moses reveals a new command to Aaron. “Then Moses said to Aaron . . .” (Exod 16:9). Moses initiates much of the conversation to Israel—“Moses said to them” (Exod 16: 15, 19, 23, 24, 25, 32). Further, the story tells us that the people disobey with reference to *Moses*, not

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<sup>66</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 63.

YHWH (16:20). As Grudem has written, “If the Old Testament prophets are seen as God’s royal messengers, and if they speak as though they are delivering unchallengeable edicts from a divine King to His people, and if it is frequently claimed that the very words of their messages have been given them by God, then it is not surprising that the prophets often speak for God in the first person.”<sup>68</sup>

Another example of this transference is seen when water comes from the rock (Exod 17). “The people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our livestock with thirst.’ . . . They tested the Lord by saying, ‘Is YHWH among us or not?’” (Exod 17:2-7). The grumbling the people is telling. They attribute their deliverance to Moses. Scripture has made abundantly clear that it is YHWH who delivered them out of Egypt (Exod 6:6-8). This interplay between Moses’ actions and YHWH’s actions becomes even more strained in Exodus 32. Israel has made an idolatrous golden calf, claiming it brought them out of slavery. YHWH is aware of what they have done and says to Moses: “Go down [the mountain], for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them” (Exod 32:7-8b). Moses replies: “O YHWH, why does your wrath burn hot against

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<sup>67</sup>Note that the text does not say they grumbled against God. Yet we see that to grumble against Moses is to grumble against YHWH himself (Exod 16:8).

<sup>68</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 23. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 227-30.

your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?”<sup>69</sup> (Exod 32:11).

When Moses emerges from the Tent of Meeting, his face not only glows as an identifier to his authority, but he also approaches the people with commands they are to obey. Whatever he says, God says. For example, Scripture is very clear that YHWH is the one who redeems Israel from Egypt and gives them the Land of Promise. After Moses passes away, Joshua presents the Land as being something given and allocated by Moses—and not YHWH.<sup>70</sup> It is also true that Moses sinned and was not perfect as YHWH is perfect—he killed an Egyptian out of anger (Exod 2:11-14) and disobeyed YHWH’s command at Meribah (Num 20:1-13; Deut 32:51). Yet, there is a primacy of the written word as the words given by YHWH to his people as his covenantal document between them.<sup>71</sup>

### **Inscripturated Words and God’s Authority**

Meredith Kline’s seminal work *The Structure of Biblical Authority*<sup>72</sup> persuasively argues that the Mosaic covenant echoes the suzerain-vassal treaties of the ANE. As a result, he concludes the necessity of a written copy of the Mosaic covenant

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<sup>69</sup>Whose hand was on display at the parting of the sea? Was it not Moses’ hand that was stretched over the water? Yet, the act is also attributed to YHWH.

<sup>70</sup>Josh 13-14 makes this switch when speaking about the distribution of the Promised Land. YHWH addresses Joshua in 13:1-8, but then comments that Moses gave the Land to the inheritors—13:8, 14, 15, 24, 29, 32-33; 14:3. Within these chapters there is also reference to Moses being the one who drove out the Canaanites, yet earlier Israel is told that it is YHWH himself who will drive out the people—13:12-13, 21.

<sup>71</sup>Thus the preserving of the Torah in the ark of the covenant in Deut 10.

<sup>72</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

(one for the lord and one for the servant).<sup>73</sup> The copy served as a “witness to and against Israel, reminding of obligations sworn to and rebuking for obligations violated; declaring the hope of covenant beatitude and pronouncing the doom of the covenant curses. The public proclamation of it was designed to teach the fear of the Lord to all Israel, especially to the children.”<sup>74</sup>

At Sinai Moses is commanded to ascend the mountain in order to receive the two tablets of the words of God—*אֶת־לְחֵת הַשְּׂבָבִין* (Exod 24:12).<sup>75</sup> Not only is emphasis laid upon the gracious giving of the Law to Moses and the people, but the fact that the word were written by the hand of God is the constant refrain.<sup>76</sup> Further, the two tablets were placed in the ark for perpetuity. As Israel crossed the Jordan with the ark of testimony leading, the Exodus event reverberated, as it led the people across dry land.<sup>77</sup>

After Moses dies, the nation could have languished without their leader. Yet it is from the Joshua 3 narrative that the people are comforted with God’s testimony being the instrument by which the Land is entered.<sup>78</sup> The criteria for whether Joshua was in leading the people was by doing according to the law given to them by Moses:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the

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<sup>73</sup>See Meredith Kline, “The Two Tables of the Covenant,” *WTJ* 22 (1959/60): 132-46.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 142. Kline helpfully draws a distinction with the Mosaic covenant’s purpose as highlighting YHWH’s graciousness and not merely curses upon his vassals (see *ibid.*, 143).

<sup>75</sup>Note the cohortative use of the imperfect qal verb: “so that I might give to you.”

<sup>76</sup>Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28; Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:10; 10:2, 4.

<sup>77</sup>Josh 3:17; cf. Exod 14:21—*הָרַבְּבָה*.

<sup>78</sup>Later the people attribute a mystical characteristic to the ark as though it is a talisman for their battles. It is taken from them to point away from the charm and to the God who wrote the words of the testimony—see 1 Sam 7 and 14.

left, that you may have good success wherever you go. *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.* For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh 1:7-8; emphasis added)

From Israel's infancy she had God's words on tablets and written down so that she might keep God's way. There were indeed many words spoken between YHWH and Moses, but it is only the Book of the Law that Moses actually penned for the people.

The people saw Moses enter the Tent of Meeting. They saw his face glow from being in the presence of the Lord. Yet there were individuals that doubted the authority endowed to Moses. Why should Israel listen to him only? Doesn't God use other people to accomplish his purposes? Can God not speak through other people and means? When Moses' authority is questioned by Miriam in Numbers 12, it is already clear that Moses does exactly what the Lord commands. His authority is again questioned by Dathan in Numbers 16. In both instances, God intervenes on behalf of his representative to reiterate his election of him as his spokesman.

The primary justification given by God as to why the people should listen to Moses in the case of Miriam's quarrel is that he stands in God's presence.

And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. *With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.* Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed (Num 12:6-9; emphasis added; cf. Exod 33:11).

There were prophets during the time of Moses, yet they did not lead God's people. They spoke for God, but their commands and visions were not written down for the people. A distinction is made between Moses and the prophets based upon their differing

relationships—quantified by proximity. For example, note how the seventy elders were blessed with the Spirit of YHWH to prophesy, but ends with the summary “they did not repeat it (וְלֹא־יָדַעְתִּי אֲשֶׁר־יָדַעְתִּי)” (Num 11:25). And Moses yearns for such an outpouring of YHWH’s Spirit so that all God’s people would be empowered to prophesy (Num 11:29). The intimate presence of YHWH with the canonical prophets is well-documented. That is, those who spoke and wrote for Israel’s progeny are demarcated by their call and having been in the presence of YHWH.<sup>79</sup> Yet, as Frame notes, even when God speaks directly to his representatives, he employs media in order to communicate—atmosphere to carry sound waves, Hebrew language, ears to hear, and minds to comprehend.<sup>80</sup>

### **Error and Finitude in Media?**

When dealing with the conferring of God’s words to his people and the correspondence between God’s Word and human words, it is important to consider in what ways God may convey his objective truth apart from corruption.<sup>81</sup> Frame helpfully distinguishes six ways in which error (and by extension, subjectivity) does not pervade Scripture because of God’s use of human instrumentality: (1) Human beings sin, but they do not *necessarily* do so; (2) “If humanity necessarily entails error, then *all* of God’s revelation in Scripture, every sentence, is erroneous, for all of it comes through human

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<sup>79</sup>Discussed at length below.

<sup>80</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 71-74.

<sup>81</sup>This is included because both errancy and post-conservatives cast a doubtful eye on the objectivity of God’s Word because of the human instrument. Particularly men like Kenton Sparks have sought to re-categorize error as accommodation so that it does not blatantly deny inerrancy—a hallmark of evangelicalism. Kenton Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 247-60.

mediation”;<sup>82</sup> (3) Christ was fully human, but he did not speak error (nor should his teaching be relegated to only the Second Temple period in Palestine); (4) “Most of the biblical statements . . . about the power, authority, and presence of God in revelation pertain to revelation through the mediation of human beings. There is no suggestion in any of these passages that human media somehow detract from or compromise the divine quality of the message; indeed, these passages exclude that possibility”; (5) human language is able to truly refer to God; (6) “the humanity of God’s word is not a liability, but a perfection. God’s intent in revelation is to communicate with people. . . . Scripture shows that God has indeed succeeded in putting his word into human words, words that prophets, apostles, and biblical writers utter as their own.”

Korah’s rebellion gives another perspective on Moses’ unique relationship with YHWH. Korah’s group retorts: “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num 16:3). In other words, “Why should we listen to only you and not the entire congregation? Doesn’t God speak through all of us?” Moses responds, “In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him. . . . The man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one” (Num 16:5).

Korah and his sons were part of the Levitical priesthood, but they were not content to let Aaron be the primary priest. What is more, Moses reiterates that all the congregation is holy; however, the Lord chooses *one man* to have preeminence over the other priests. First, the Lord chooses one man to be the holy one. Second, as an indication

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<sup>82</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 73-74.

of this election, he draws him near. Third, to speak against the one YHWH draws near is to speak against YHWH himself—“Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?” (Num 16:11). Fourth, the election of a particular man is accompanied by signs of power (Num 16:28-30). The Spirit of God is tethered to the man God chooses. While the entire congregation has been blessed by the presence of YHWH in their midst, God elects individuals to be vessels of his words. These representatives do not need to appeal to the community in order to be heeded. Indeed, much of what they say will speak contrary to the actions of the community. They stand over the community, because they speak in God’s stead. He is their Redeemer. He owns them and does not need to ask for their input.

As was stated above, the Pentateuchal narrative moves from demonstrating a strong connection between YHWH and his representative, Moses, to doing everything but equating YHWH with Moses. This is true both from Moses’ initial call where Moses is told his role be that of God himself, while Aaron will be his prophet—”And the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet’” (Exod 7:1). The people of God were to obey everything Moses said because he spoke as God himself.<sup>83</sup> “Indeed, in verse 16, Moses is called ‘God.’ He functions as God because he gives God’s words to Aaron, his prophet. There is no decrease in authority among God himself, Moses/Aaron’s God), and Aaron. Moses and

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<sup>83</sup>Note the progression from Exod 4:28 to Exod 36:6; 38:21 to Josh 4:10.

Aaron have the authority of God because they speak God's words."<sup>84</sup> Disobedience to God's man meant disobedience to YHWH himself—resulting in removal from the people of God by leprosy or death from the earth swallowing them up.

What is of particular interest is the relationship between Aaron and Moses (prophet to God) as analogous to the office of prophet to YHWH. That is, Aaron is shown throughout the Pentateuch to be obeyed just as Moses is to be obeyed. He is to report to the people Moses' bidding. To disobey him is to disobey Moses. As the OT narrative progresses, the office of prophet takes on a deeper significance as it relates to God's words. The issue of appeal to ultimate authority will be discussed in chapters five and six, but suffice to show that God's appointed men are to be obeyed because he has chosen them. When the question is raised: "Why should I listen to Moses?" The reply: "Because God has chosen him." When the question is asked by subsequent generations: "Why should we obey the written words of Moses?" The reply remains: "Because God has appointed him." Surely Moses' words are heavenly, efficacious, noncontradictory, and incomparable in excellency, yet his words are only acceptable insofar that God has anointed him (and not merely his words) as the leader for God's people.<sup>85</sup>

God's anoints Moses in order to lead his people (Exodus 19-20). YHWH wanted to speak to the people directly, but they became afraid when they heard his voice and requested that Moses meet with God. YHWH called Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the covenantal stipulations on behalf of the people. He tells Moses: "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and

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<sup>84</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 88-89.

may also believe you forever” (Exod 19:9b). Then in Exodus 20:21 the people acquiesce and say to Moses: “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us lest we die” (Exod 20:19). And Moses comments: “The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was” (v. 21). This meeting with God continued throughout the wilderness wanderings so that Moses would receive all the commands he was to relay to the covenantal people (Exod 33:9-10).

In the exodus narrative above, YHWH told Moses that he would meet with him in order to speak to him and so that the people might believe him *forever* (לְעֹלָם). The commands Moses gave were not meant to serve only as an audible command for the generation that heard his voice. But YHWH so anointed Moses and so identified with him that his words were to be retained forever. In Exodus 24 the covenant between YHWH and the people is confirmed. Moses sanctifies the people with blood. Verse 7 says: “Then [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant [סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית] and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that YHWH has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that YHWH has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exod 24:7-9). Note that YHWH does not descend in a cloud to give the commands which the people submit themselves to.

The words in the Book of the Covenant are considered to be the very words of God. There is no trumpet sound to set apart the words from common words. Rather, the opening of the Book of the Covenant and the reading of it serves as proof enough for the people that what it says, God says. “God will not be tested, as if there were an authority

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<sup>85</sup>These adjectives are in reference to the *WCF* 1.5.

higher than himself. His word is not subject to evaluation by human standards. It is not doubtful or disputable. . . . The clay may not dispute with the potter.”<sup>86</sup> Following the confirmation of the covenant, YHWH calls Moses to ascend the mountain with Joshua, at which time he will receive the tablets of stone written by the very finger of God (Exod 24:12-18). The words (on the tablets) which YHWH gave to Moses were intended to be retained in perpetuity so that an ark of acacia wood served as its home forever (Exod 25:10-22).<sup>87</sup> This same word given to Moses and ministered by Joshua reaches throughout the narrative—both in structuring the blessing/curse motif begun in the Pentateuch as well as confirmation of its validity as Israel disobeys and repents.<sup>88</sup>

### **God’s Earthly Presence Through His Prophet**

God so identifies himself with his representative that to sin against the prophet is to rebel against God. The book of Judges makes evident that there was no man who speaks for God. YHWH speaks to the people through the words of the written covenant. As Scott Swain has written, “Prophets and apostles do not simply bear witness to what God has said. Because they speak in God’s name and on God’s behalf, *God speaks* when they speak. . . . When God speaks through his prophets and apostles, God communicates

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<sup>86</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 86.

<sup>87</sup>The perpetual nature of the covenant is assumed throughout the narrative—Exod 12:14, 17, 21, 24; 27:21; 28:43; 29:9; 31:16; Lev 10:15; 16:29; Deut 5:29; 12:28; 1 Chr 16:15; 28:7; Pss 111:9; 119:160.

<sup>88</sup>For example, we read in 1 Kgs 16:34: “In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of YHWH, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.” This is a confirmation of the curse that Joshua laid upon the conquered city of Jericho, written down in Josh 6:26.

*himself*<sup>89</sup> He indicts them by saying, “Because this people has transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of YHWH as their fathers did, or not” (Judg 2:20-22). There was no need for new words from YHWH’s mouth. All that was needed to keep covenant with him was written down for the generation following Moses. The book of Judges provides a litany of offenses against God’s covenant—Canaanite worship, child sacrifice, demise of the levitical priesthood.

Throughout the remainder of the Tanakh there is a pointing back to the Mosaic covenant. In many ways it is merely the narrative of God’s dealings with Israel—their apostasy, repentance, and faith. The king is expected to meditate on the Law of YHWH day and night—“When [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law [given through Moses], approved by the Levitical priests” (Deut 17:18). After the narrative makes clear that Israel had wandered from YHWH, God saves his people by calling the priest Samuel. Prior to his election by YHWH, “the word of YHWH was rare . . . there was no frequent visions” (1 Sam 3:1). Although there had been priests ministering before the Lord, YHWH was silent.

Samuel proves to be a new mosaic figure in leading the people. Although Samuel rebukes the people’s pagan desire for a king, we are told that “the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel” (1 Sam 8:19)—reminiscent of Israel’s refusal to obey Moses. Their refusal to obey Samuel indicates that they had, in fact, disobeyed YHWH; for YHWH said to Samuel, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from

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<sup>89</sup>Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 36; emphasis original.

being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, *so they are doing to you*” (1 Sam 8:7-8).

### ***Nabi'im***

Since the time of Moses, God has used men as mediums of communication with his people. As a means to inform men what he desired of them he used the lips of men as opposed to direct communication with the entire race after the Fall. In the Garden, God spoke face to face with Adam when he gave him the solitary command not to eat from one of the trees in the Garden. Although the heavens do declare the glory of God, since the beginning God has had to interpret his creation to man so that he might know his place in it. From the first chapters of Genesis God's word is characterized as powerful to create *ex nihilo* and as authoritative so that there is no higher court of appeal.

Even before sin blurred man's vision of the world around him, he was in need of God's word to direct him as to his purpose in it. After the Fall, the issue, however, is not that man's vision was blurred, but that sin began to suppress the truth of what was already abundantly illuminated in the heavens.<sup>90</sup> What God's interpretive word does, then, is give meaning and contours to how man must live in light of his Creator.<sup>91</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup>See Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Syllabus from Westminster Theological Seminary: Philadelphia, 1952), 111-12: “The revelation from the created universe did place man face to face with God and not merely with the idea of the existence of God. Yet it was through the revelation by direct communication that God's purpose and places with respect to the universe appeared more fully still. And, by revealing his purposes and plans more fully, God also revealed himself more fully. And it is only in relation to this fuller revelation of God that the facts of nature and man could appear in their proper light.” See also Theodore Vriezen, *An Outline of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 190.

<sup>91</sup>There are 5602 occurrences of אָמַר and its cognates and 2667 of דָּבַר and its cognates. Obviously the discussion of God's speech in the OT will be selective. This paper will necessarily be

prophetic office was given, then, as God’s means to communicate with his image-bearers, who had been corrupted by sin—unable to see and hear him directly without dying.

There are three primary characteristics of the OT prophets, which pointed to their authority to impart the words of YHWH. First, the prophets were *sent* by God to the people. The call of the prophet was the ground upon which his words would be heeded. That is, if he was sent then the people should listen to him. If not, they are under no obligations. Without exception the canonical prophets appeal to their initial call before they begin uttering God’s words.<sup>92</sup> “Without doubt, the OT accounts of call claim divinely supported authority.”<sup>93</sup> The God of Israel is not like other gods who are

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treating one aspect of God’s communication with man in the OT given the limitation of space—namely, the prophets will be highlighted. Additionally, the issue of circularity as pertains to Holy Scripture will not be treated here for the previous reason. This is a foundational topic to the area of the self-attestation of Scripture. This chapter, however, will focus on the biblical portrait of Jesus, his words, and those of the OT. The reader is referred to John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.7.5; Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 101-64; idem, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 9-14; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 583-85; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 194-219. As Bahnsen succinctly puts it, “Who is in an authoritative position to say [the proper indications of divinity]? The answer is that only God could tell us reliably and authoritatively what qualities mark out His word as really His. . . . Thus, *only God is adequate to bear witness to Himself or to authorize His own words.*” Ibid., 199; emphasis original. In this discussion of self-attestation, a distinction between “attestation” and “illumination” must be made. The former speaks of the objective nature of what Scripture says about itself; the latter speaks of the subjective element of the Holy Spirit affirming what is objectively true. For an excellent treatment of the doctrine of Scripture’s inspiration see Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955); especially on self-attestation issues see 106-18.

<sup>92</sup>The only possible exception is Amos who begins not with a call from YHWH but with a vision and a prologue of “the word of Amos” and Obadiah, which begins with Obadiah’s vision. However, among the prophets visions are interchangeable with words since these visions still needed to be communicated with the covenant members. Secondly, throughout prophetic literature there is an ambiguity between the prophet’s words and those of YHWH—see especially Jer 7. Else Holt, “Word of Jeremiah—Word of God: Structures of Authority in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed. John Goldingay (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 175; also Christoph Levin, “The ‘Word of Yahweh’: A Theological Concept in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Michael Floyd and Robert Haak (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 47; Moshe Weinfeld, “Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature,” in *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 32-49.

<sup>93</sup>Burke O. Long, “Prophetic Authority as Social Reality,” in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 9. Long goes on to address the issue that the call formula may have been added by the community to

summoned by prophets and sorcerers. Rather, he initiates and is intimately attune to their needs.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the living God of Israel has a relationship with his people and answers their cries for help—not from appeasement through sacrifice (as in other ANE religions) but due to his initiating mercy (Exod 2:23-25; Num 11:1; Deut 5:28).

After the days of Joshua, when God’s people cry for deliverance he sent them men who spoke his word so that they would repent and obey. What is this word of repentance and obedience except the written covenant code of conduct found in Torah? It is clear that the OT prophets justified their calls to repentance and faith based upon the previously written words of God. They saw themselves as means by which YHWH would bring his covenant people to the eschatological Land. As Rendtorff says, “[The prophets] have a special divine commission constantly to remind Israel of, and call them back to, what is the foundation of its life as the people of God.”<sup>95</sup> That is, the written document of the covenant served as the canon by which the people’s ethic was measured.

Thus, the words of the Torah have an intrinsic authority to them because of their origin and their use in the life of the covenant people. Two works have been helpful in showing the relationship between the chronologically-bound *theopneustia* and the

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give authority to the canonical book. Without going into too much argumentation, this seems to be placing the contingent on the substantive. In other words, the prophets would have to have had authority already in order to be considered canonical. Such an addition by an amanuensis would be superfluous in an effort to give weight to a man’s already heavy, canonical words. Thus, it seems more likely that the prophets spoke of their calls and their visions to point away from themselves and towards the Originator of such visions and words.

<sup>94</sup>Erik Hornung, “Ancient Egyptian Religious Iconography,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 3:1711-30.

<sup>95</sup>Rolff Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Deo, 2005), 658. So also Edmond Jacob, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 133; Vriezen, *Outline of the Old Testament*, 222, 226, 232-33; Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 89; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:348.

permanency of the Scriptures. Meredith Kline traces the formation of the OT canon and its relationship to the mighty acts of God in history.<sup>96</sup> Kline's well-argued thesis shows that ANE communities had written documents that enumerated the blessings and curses that would take place between the lord and his servants. Given the fact of the Exodus event, YHWH did the same with the Hebrews so that they had a document to which they could turn to know what they must do.

The second pertinent work is Joseph Blenkinsopp's *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins*.<sup>97</sup> Blenkinsopp is particularly helpful in understanding why the prophetic writings were recorded on parchment. That is, he answers the question, "Why and how did the prophetic utterances get recorded?" His answer: The words of the prophets are not ecstatic, uncontrollable cries. Rather, they are organized, impassioned pleas for the people to heed. The reason for their being recorded is so that God's words of interpretation could be referenced. Childs confirms this when he says that the written word became "the vehicle for discerning God's will through the office of the interpreter."<sup>98</sup> In summary, the assumption of the ANE is that the interpreting/prophetic word was authoritative and written down for posterity's rule of faith.

The second characteristic of the prophetic word is that they spoke *God's* words. Ezekiel ate God's words (Ezek 3). YHWH spoke to Isaiah (Isa 7:3). God's word

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<sup>96</sup>Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*.

<sup>97</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1986).

<sup>98</sup>Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 172.

came to Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah. All these instances are owing to God's words having an objective nature—as something outside of the prophets' own contrivances. The words that the prophet spoke, although not originating with them were identified as their self- same speech. They were not taken into a trance-like state. Their appeal to be heard was grounded in YHWH who spoke. They viewed themselves as reporters of what they were told and saw.

A third characteristic of the prophets that speaks to their authority as God's spokesmen has to do with *authentication*. Whereas the first two are *a priori* verifications, this is an *a posteriori* substantiation. With regard to the first two characteristics, the prophets spoke as ones sent by God and carried his words to the people; this was unquestionable. Additionally, however, YHWH gave the people a test by which they would know whether the prophet spoke for him. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 mentions two pieces that would be the means to know: prediction and covenantally-bound truth. Moses tells the people that although a man may foretell future events, he is not a prophet of YHWH if he tells them to follow other gods. The prediction piece is implied in the relationship the prophet has with YHWH. Indeed, it is integrally related to what it means for YHWH to be God (Isa 46:10).

This aspect of authentication is made based upon the office of the prophet. Samuel began the succession of prophets.<sup>99</sup> The prophets called Israel back to the written Torah as foundational for their exhortations. Theologians have argued that the prophet

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<sup>99</sup>This is not to say that Moses and men prior to were not prophets; this relates primarily to the cultic and political office of prophet for the Israelite community.

was tied both to the cult<sup>100</sup> and the politics of the Israelite community.<sup>101</sup> Authority rests within (at least in part) the office.<sup>102</sup>

Another aspect of this authentication was tied to the Spirit of God empowering men to speak the words of God. The contrast between God's Spirit coming in condemnation and in blessing is no more starkly seen than in King Saul (1 Sam 16:14). As king he was anointed with the Spirit of God for leadership, but YHWH's Spirit could also rush upon him so that he would prophesy (1 Sam 10:9-13; 19:18-24). Ezekiel cited this as the primary means by which his words would be authenticated—the Spirit entered him (2:2); lifted him up (3:12); fell upon him (11:5)—as differentiated from the false prophets who spoke from their own spirits (13:3).

Yet another aspect in this characteristic of the prophet's authentication ties the ethic of the prophet to his words. That is, the true prophet will be authenticated by his right life.<sup>103</sup> This is seen most clearly in Jeremiah's confrontation of the false prophets. They were using covenantal phrases, but their unethical lives proved their hope-filled prophecies disingenuous. The words of YHWH should have produced in the people a likeness to him; they should have proclaimed and lived out liberty instead of falsehood. They should have practiced justice because this is what it means to emulate and be in

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<sup>100</sup>Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 240.

<sup>101</sup>Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 168; he sees a "direct correlation between the rise and demise of both institutions."

<sup>102</sup>See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 144. Originally the three offices (prophet, priest, and king) were represented in one man, Adam. After the Fall, the OT witnesses a division to the offices (i.e., Melchizedek is a priest and a king, Moses is a prophet, Aaron is a priest); yet in David there is a glimpse into his unifying all three offices into one man (2 Sam 6-7).

covenant with God.<sup>104</sup> Since they refused to act in accordance with YHWH's words, he would act to accomplish what he set out to do in the first chapter—tear down and destroy (Jer 34:17).

In spite of their disobedience, God's narrative to his people moves forward. In the midst of a wicked king, YHWH calls out the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Once Elijah is introduced in 1 Kings 17, the word of YHWH proves a sharp sword that divides the faithful and the reprobate. Elijah comes to the king of Israel (Ahab) and pronounces a curse upon the land as a result of his disobedience. He speaks on his own accord as God's representative.<sup>105</sup> Following his pronouncement of drought (in accord with the Mosaic curse in Deut 11:17 and its reprisal in 1 Kgs 8:35), the word of YHWH (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) moves the narrative and increases its tension between prophet and king.

In the midst of a crooked generation, Elijah walks among YHWH's remnant to preserve them and show himself merciful—from the widow at Zarephath (17:8-24), defeat of Ba'al's prophets (18:17-40), and forth telling (1 Kgs 1). His apprentice, Elisha, also proves to be YHWH incarnate for the remnant (condemning covenant breakers and blessing the covenant faithful)—oil that does not run out (2 Kgs 4:1-7), resurrecting a Shunnamite's son (2 Kgs 4:8-37), and forth telling (2 Kgs 13:14-19). Like the train of Mosaic prophethood, signs accompany Elijah's words. To obey him is to obey YHWH.

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<sup>103</sup>So also Willem VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 59-69.

<sup>104</sup>Christoph Levin argues that *debar YHWH* is “not simply Yahweh’s speaking; it is the theological concept of that.” This means that the term represented not merely speech but also action (on God’s part and the requirement to live in accordance on the people’s part). Levin, ““Word of Yahweh,”” 43.

<sup>105</sup>Note how there is no prefatory “and the word of YHWH came to x” in the account found in 1 Kgs 17:1.

## The Word of YHWH, Jeremiah, and Authority in the Old Testament

Obviously more could be said of these prototypical prophets, but the remainder of this chapter will look at the prophet Jeremiah as representative of the prophetic office.<sup>106</sup> Through an evaluation of his ministry and words, a strong connection between the prophet (he who speaks on YHWH's behalf) and YHWH will be shown. As shown in Moses, Nathan, and Elijah, YHWH so identifies himself with his chosen representative that he claims to be present among his people through the person of the prophet. Through the prophet, YHWH calls his people back to covenantal faithfulness and performs mighty acts and wonders in their midst so that they might heed the word spoken by him.

At the very basic level, the Bible claims to be a faithful collection of God's words to his people. While "the word of God" is not *the* center of the OT, it is the glue that holds the entire biblical testimony together.<sup>107</sup> If God has not spoken, there can be no Scripture.<sup>108</sup> There would not be spokesmen called out by God—Moses and the prophets.

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<sup>106</sup>Needless to say each of the prophets could be treated in detail. Due to length, Jeremiah will serve the purpose of identifying and highlighting the relationship between YHWH and the prophet since themes present in the other prophets are represented in Jeremiah's life and ministry—the call from YHWH, reticence in the call, a call that is not heeded, yet still given, discourse between the prophet and YHWH, visions, future predictions, commands to nations other than Israel. Additionally, Jeremiah (as will be seen as this section unfolds) relies heavily upon Mosaic imagery and covenantal discourse. This element of calling God's people *back to* the Mosaic document is an over-arching theme for the prophet.

<sup>107</sup>As Theodore Vriezen has said, the Word of God is the "secret" of the OT. It is a secret insofar that it is not an easily traceable theme; yet, it is the ground upon which the OT is constructed. See Vriezen, *Outline of the Old Testament*, 102.

<sup>108</sup>In an effort to elucidate Jeremiah as God's spokesman, considering the book's structure is no mere formality. Its structure informs and shapes the way that Jeremiah words drive the flow of the book. Speech is a controlling governor in the prophecies of Jeremiah. Jack Lundbom believes that there are two speech structures that interplay and organize the book—*inclusio* and *chiasmus*. Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975). Willis adds a third element by suggesting *dialogue* between Jeremiah and the people. John Willis, "Dialogue Between Prophet and Audience as a Rhetorical Device in the Book of Jeremiah," *JSOT* 33 (1985): 63-82. Dividing the book according to rhetoric—*inclusio*, *chiasmus*, and *dialogue*—appears to be the best way to divide the book.

creation exists because of God’s word. The people of Israel exist because God spoke to the patriarchs and made promises by which he would act in history to realize those promises. The parameters for living in communion with God are given by God, himself, through his representative. It is true that there are several themes in the OT and NT—each relating to another because of their singular source, God. It is upon the presupposition that this is God’s word that every theme in the two testaments is built.

Scripture’s self-attestation is evident in the book of Jeremiah<sup>109</sup> and this section offers a brief analysis of the NT’s view and relationship to the word of God as understood in Jeremiah and the OT.<sup>110</sup> Given the multi-faceted nature of Jeremiah’s narrative, discourse, portents, and poetry, his book is an excellent test case for how the word of God is the ‘adhesive’ that holds his book together.<sup>111</sup> Jeremiah’s life and ministry shadows

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Following Lundbom and Willis in this way, justice is done to the text of Jeremiah so that his interactions with YHWH and the people along with recurring themes form a tapestry rather than a linear progression of an argument. Stulman seems to adopt such a structure when he divides the book into two parts with assistance by the prose sermons, which serve as commentary on the biographical and poetic sections. Louis Stulman, *Order and Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1998), 17-19. There is debate as to how the book should be ordered. This is evident from the varied divisions one finds. Each of the following works consulted had *major* structural differences in Jeremiah: C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Jeremiah-Lamentations* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006); R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). In this way, the rhetorical structure to Jeremiah gives solidarity to the book—placing emphasis on the speech of God, prophet, and people.

<sup>109</sup>This evaluation will necessarily be selective in its treatment of this theme since the words related to God’s speech in the book of Jeremiah are too numerous to treat exhaustively—דָּבַר (340x), אָמַר (480x), נָאָם (30x), various idiomatic expressions referring to speech (דָּבַר (hif.), נָאָם (qal), שָׁמַח (hif.), דָּבַר (hif.), etc.), and metaphorical expressions (נָאָם – roar; נָאָם – wail, cry out; קָרַר – mourn; שָׂשׂ – rejoice; בָּכָה – weep; etc.) according to *Accordance* 6.9.2.

<sup>110</sup>While the NT does not use Jeremiah, necessarily, as justification for how it views the word of God, it uses categories and allusions that verify this paper’s thesis in its affirmation of how God’s word related to a) the prophet, b) the people, and c) God’s work in the world.

<sup>111</sup>Else Holt speaks of the word of God as being a necessity in Jeremiah in order that the book does not collapse. She sees “divergent and often contradictory messages” in Jeremiah, which “the authority

that of Moses in a most uncanny way and serves as a foil for how the prophetic train, as it followed Moses' lead, was perceived in the writing of the OT. The cult, ethic, and future of God's people are rooted in God's word to them. He creates and commands by his word so that his people may know how they must live and so that they may know him.

### **God Appoints His Spokesman**

How does God go about selecting his representatives? It is one thing to assert that God chooses people to speak for him. It is entirely different to see that he does so in time and space and with words. The book of Jeremiah begins with the phrase 'the words of Jeremiah' (יְהִיָּהוּהוּ; so also Isaiah, Amos, and Obadiah)—a phrase which is given prominence throughout the book. Other prophets begin their ministry *after* receiving all the words of YHWH (כָּל־דְּבַרֵי יְהוָה; or a vision in the case of Isaiah and Obadiah). This resonating aspect—that the word of God is concurrent with the word spoken by the prophet—sounds throughout the book. Jeremiah gives God's words to Israel since the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah (1:2, 4) simultaneously with his words (v. 1). As Holt writes, "This blurring of the two voices is not haphazard or the result of unskilled redactional activity."<sup>112</sup> Inherent in the call to be a prophet is the call to speak for God.

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of the notion of the divine word" holds together. While this author believes Holt is mistaken in her view of contradictory messages, he believes her analysis is sound in that the authority bestowed upon Jeremiah provides foundation to all of his utterances. Else Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 186. This authority is directly linked to the source of the words, YHWH. So also Levin who says, "The event of transmission of the word is the foundation of prophecy. . . . [The word of Yahweh] is mighty in history because its efficacy is grounded in Yahweh himself, in the congruity between what Yahweh says and what he does." Christoph Levin, "Word of Yahweh," 47. The narrative places emphasis that YHWH will place *his* words in Jeremiah's mouth. This is the assurance he gives him. Jeremiah does not ground his argument against Hananiah solely on being *sent* by God (though this is part of the apology). Jeremiah's argument implicitly rests on the fact that Jeremiah has *YHWH's* words. He is sent by *God*.

<sup>112</sup>Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 175.

This is clear in Jeremiah's rebuttal as to why he should not be a prophet—"But look, I do not know how to speak (דַּבַּר) for I am only a youth" (1:6).

Jeremiah's refutation is reminiscent of another prophet, Moses, who claimed he was not eloquent and had "a slow mouth and a heavy tongue" (Exod 4:10). In both cases YHWH reassures his prophets that he will bless them with his presence (Jer 1:8; Exod 4:12). The difference between these two accounts, however, lies in how YHWH's words are stewarded. For Moses, God will teach him what to say and Moses is to put words into Aaron's mouth (Exod 4:15). For Jeremiah, YHWH, himself, will put his words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1:9). In spite of this difference, there is substantial similarity. In both cases, the grounding for what the prophets are to speak is YHWH, who is also the source of the commands. By virtue of God's very presence they are enabled to speak God's words.<sup>113</sup>

Similar to Isaiah's call (Isa 6:7), Jeremiah's lips are cleansed as a foreshadowing of what is to come—castigation of God's people for covenant unfaithfulness and putting forth future hope of a New Covenant.<sup>114</sup> YHWH touches Jeremiah's mouth, as a way of sanctifying his representative's instrument of ministry and showing him as set apart to speak words that are pure and transcendent to the licentious

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<sup>113</sup>R. J. Hayward, *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* (Lenham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982).

<sup>114</sup>Glazov forcefully argues that the purifying of the prophet's lips symbolized the need for moral purity—for the speaker as well as that purification that would ensue from his words. Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy* (London: T&T Clark, 2001), 111-63.

covenant breakers. Thereby God places his words in his mouth, so that he can tear down the rebelliousness of the house of Israel and build up faithfulness.<sup>115</sup>

Related to the notion of words placed in the mouth, God's word is compared to food so that the ingestion of them means that one has incorporated YHWH's words into his body.<sup>116</sup> In this way, the word of YHWH has objectivity so that it can be hypostasized for eating. It is not mere subjective experience so that only those things that have effect upon the prophet can be considered God's word. Prior to any effect given in the narrative, Jeremiah speaks of words that are distinct and clear. Jeremiah is to fulfill his ministry with this assurance "everything which I command you, you will speak" (1:7). Jeremiah is like the mother bird that feeds her brood with the worm she received that morning. Thus, the word of YHWH is not merely dictated, but it comes in the voice and tears of the prophet. They are pure words, untainted by fallen man's unclean lips. The word of God is unbound by the prophet's finite understanding of the world and YHWH's plans behind Babylonian exile. Jeremiah's words are to be obeyed because they are also God's words.

Jeremiah's words are means to an end. That is, he has been called from his mother's womb in order "to uproot and break down" (לְנָתוּשׁ וְלְנָתוּץ), "to kill and tear apart" (וְלִהְיֶאֱבִיר וְלִהְרוֹס), and "to build up and plant" (לְבָנוֹת וְלִנְטוּעַ).<sup>117</sup> Holt makes the observation that these verbs are paralleled in six other places in Jeremiah: 12:14-17; 18:7, 9; 24:6; 31:28; 42:10; 45:4—all of which have YHWH as their subject, not the

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<sup>115</sup>Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns," 32-49.

<sup>116</sup>Jeremiah uses his consumption of YHWH's words as justification for his actions (15:16; cf. Ezek 3:1-2).

<sup>117</sup>Compare Isa 6:9-13.

prophet.<sup>118</sup> YHWH indicts his people for their moral collapse throughout the rest of the book but finishes by offering them hope of a new, expanded order (see below).

### **The Prophet Speaks in God's Stead**

As mentioned above, the dialogue in Jeremiah (particularly ch. 1) is purposefully ambiguous. The situation is no different in the Temple speech of chapter 7. In his analysis of grammatical markers in this chapter, Andrew Shead remarks, “One begins to suspect that a desire for the ‘right reading’ is hampering a good reading. For in this passage *the voices of YHWH and Jeremiah are one*, and it is meaningless (and fruitless) to try and distinguish them.”<sup>119</sup>

While James Barr has rightly concluded that the word דבר should not be understood as a synthesis between the word and the object signified, there is no doubt that the OT shows a clear relationship.<sup>120</sup> This is plain from the inception of Jeremiah's prophecy: “I, myself, am watching over my word (כִּי־שָׁקֵד אֲנִי עַל־דְּבָרִי) in order to accomplish it (לַעֲשׂוֹהוּ)” (1:12). *God acts through his speech*. Again, the Lord speaks in judgment (בְּשִׁפְטֵימִי) against his people (4:12) and he promises that the land will be desolate because he has said so and intended it to be so (כִּי־דִבַּרְתִּי וְנִמְתִּי; 4:28). Since they

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<sup>118</sup>“It is a flexible string, not a fixed formula, since the six verbs are not all used in each and every instance.” Holt, “Word of Jeremiah—Word of God,” 177. Brueggemann speaks of these verbs as a “thematization” for the theology of the entire book (Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007], 38-39). This author believes Brueggemann goes too far to try and find correspondence with these verbs to city and monarchy because it strains the poetic license of the verbs, a poetry he affirms—calling attention to Holt's quotation in this footnote.

<sup>119</sup>Andrew T. Shead, *The Open Book and the Sealed Book: Jeremiah 32 in Its Hebrew and Greek Recensions* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 34; emphasis added.

<sup>120</sup>James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 133-34.

refused to act in accordance with YHWH's words, he would act to accomplish what he set out to do in the first chapter—tear down and destroy (34:17).

The relationship between word and deed is also related to Jeremiah as the “metaphorization” of the word of God.<sup>121</sup> Jeremiah becomes for the people a living picture of God's word to his people. Even more, the word of God (as already seen as closely tied to YHWH's actions) is a metaphor for God, and Jeremiah becomes a metaphor for the word—thus, a metaphor for God! Recalling Shead's argument above for the purposeful ambiguity in chapter 7, the prophet is told to stand in the gates and plead with the people to let him dwell with them. Is Jeremiah asking to dwell with the people, or is it God pleading for his own presence to be allowed to dwell with the people? In the Greek recension, the first two verses of the chapter are absent, which provides for a simpler structure that lays force on Jeremiah as the speaker—an excision that would easily reconcile the ambiguity and possible blasphemy. However, “the MT points to God as the speaker.”<sup>122</sup> Moses acted as God to Aaron (Exod 4:16), and Jeremiah acted as God to the people.

Kessler sees this same personification of the word of God when he divides the book into chapters 1-25 as the word of God (in the form of mostly oracles) and a second part consisting of chapters 26-45 as the people's response to the word of God.<sup>123</sup> The people's response to God's word consists primarily of actions taken against the prophet—seen in the imprisonment and release of the prophet (chap. 37-38). They seek to silence

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<sup>121</sup>Holt, “Word of Jeremiah—Word of God,” 174-75.

<sup>122</sup>Shead, *The Open Book*, 33.

God's word of judgment by putting it in prison, but Jeremiah's release elucidates the unbound nature of God's powerful word.<sup>124</sup>

### **Prophet as God's Presence**

Although God brings about calamity on his rebellious people, a very telling passage in the oracles on the nations provides more insight into Jeremiah's relationship to the word of YHWH. With regards to Moab, God wails (אֵי־לֵיל ; 48:31) and weeps (אֵזַעַק ; 48:31) for the people because of the desolation that will come upon them. As von Rad has pointed out, "When the prophet's life entered the vale of deep suffering and abandonment by God, this became a unique kind of witness-bearing."<sup>125</sup> Jeremiah's weeping (chap. 9) is evidence of YHWH's weeping over his people.<sup>126</sup> In this way, Jeremiah becomes the visible words for the people.<sup>127</sup> Eichrodt has written, "[God's word] is not simply a force of destiny striding heedlessly over man, but a divine personality which, in the very act of repulsing and rejecting him, yet enters into a genuine relationship, and takes him seriously as a being with a will of his own."<sup>128</sup> He cries for her because of her forsaking him as well as the punishment that will come upon her. In

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<sup>123</sup>Martin Kessler, "Jeremiah Chapters 26-45 Reconsidered," *JNES* 27 (1968): 81-88. This follows Stulman's divisions based on rhetoric mentioned above.

<sup>124</sup>Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 174-75.

<sup>125</sup>Geerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), 2:36.

<sup>126</sup>This personal interplay between the prophet and the people as well as the prophet and God communicates the personal nature of God, as opposed to other ANE religions mentioned above. See Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 181-82, 221.

<sup>127</sup>Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 244-45.

<sup>128</sup>Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:348.

this way, then, Jeremiah puts flesh on the words of God so that word and the thing signified come together.<sup>129</sup>

### **A Prophet Like Moses: The Train of God's Spokesmen**

As has already been mentioned, there are allusions to the prophet Moses in the Jeremiah's narrative. The first words of Jeremiah are reminiscent of those of Deuteronomy ("words of Jeremiah," Jer 1:1; "words of Moses," Deut 1:1). YHWH promised to be with his prophet in order to accomplish that for which he sent him. The Midrash to Jeremiah makes this connection readily when it speaks of Jeremiah being a fulfillment of a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18-19).<sup>130</sup>

The narrative in Jeremiah 36 about the scroll that is written down by Baruch, destroyed by the king, and re-written by Baruch parallels that of the writing of the ten words on tablets (Exod 32:18-19; 34:1-35). Holt comments, "The (re-)giving of the Torah adds a surplus of meaning and authority to the scroll narrative."<sup>131</sup> The rewriting in both texts is meant to "regulate the life of the people. This is why the absolute completeness of

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<sup>129</sup>This is magnified in the life of Hosea, who pursued his wife and his love went requited. Further, his life serves as a pictorial metaphor indicting Israel's unfaithfulness. See Ray Ortlund Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 47-136.

<sup>130</sup>*Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 13:6. Jacob Neusner, *Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book* (Lanham, MD: United Press of America, 2006). Just as Moses was thrown into a river, Jeremiah was thrown into a pit. Moses was saved by a slave girl, Jeremiah was saved by a slave boy. Brueggemann affirms such a reading, supporting William Holladay's thesis, that "the tradition characterizes Jeremiah exactly as the one 'like Moses.'" Brueggemann, *Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, 74; cf. 23.

<sup>131</sup>Holt, "Word of Jeremiah—Word of God," 185.

the written messages is stressed.”<sup>132</sup> It is necessary to have the written word in order to hold accountable God’s covenant people.

It is clear that much of what Jeremiah says and calls the people to do is rooted in the covenant at Sinai. Because they had rebelled against the covenant, God’s judgment on the people is justified. It is clear in chapter 22 that the people had oppressed the poor (contra Lev 23:22). Verse 13 indicts the people for making their neighbors serve them for nothing (contra Deut 24:14). The tenor of the accusation against the sons of Josiah shows a gap in the way their father brought about reforms according to God’s word and how they have done the opposite of the case laws presented to Israel for social justice (i.e., Exod 21-23). Their father sought out and performed justice (vv. 15-16), but they have forsaken it by perverting it. Jeremiah is more than a little familiar with Deuteronomy. Indeed, his entire ministry is calling people to remember and come under the covenant stipulations.<sup>133</sup> And in the same way that Moses did everything “according to the word of YHWH,” Jeremiah obeys in every way.<sup>134</sup>

Chapter 11 is the most explicit passage with regards to the covenant at Sinai. YHWH calls down a curse (אָרֶרָה ; v.4) on those individuals who will not hear (לֹא יִשְׁמַע) the words of the covenant (אֶת־דְּבַר־יְהוָה הַבְּרִיתָ), which YHWH made with their forefathers (11:3-4). The reason given as to why they should listen is so that YHWH might confirm the oath (אֶת־הַשְּׁבוּעָה) he made to their fathers (v.5)—so they might, ultimately, enter

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Contra H.H. Rowley, *From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament* (New York: Association Press, 1963), 207-08. Rowley believes that Jeremiah was only somewhat aware of the deuteronomic law.

<sup>134</sup>Levin, “Word of Yahweh,” 54.

the rest of the Promised Land they had not come to inherit yet. God urges them to obey the words of the covenant that their fathers did not (v. 7). Even though God brought to them the curses of the covenant, they still refused to listen and obey the words of the covenant (v. 8).<sup>135</sup>

In Exodus 19:9 YHWH tells Moses that he will appear to the people in an ominous cloud so that the people might hear (יִשְׁמְעוּ) him speak (בְּדַבָּרִי). In the beginning of the narrative, God tells the people that if they will hear his words and heed them, they will be his treasured possession.<sup>136</sup> Through Moses' mediation, YHWH spoke face to face with *the people* (עַמּוֹתָא; Deut 5:4). How much less can the people hear God's words due to their not having been consecrated and by essentially re-enacting the golden calf rebellion?

For the purposes of our evaluation of Jeremiah, there is interplay between the covenant that YHWH made with their fathers and their contemporary context of sin. God made a covenant with those who were entering the Promised Land (and not with their fathers; vv. 2-3). The words of the covenant (vv. 6-21) were meant to be passed down to their progeny (5:31; 6:7) so that the children of the *original recipients* of the covenant were also brought under the stipulations of the ten words (אֲשֶׁרֶת הַדְּבָרִים; Deut 4:13;

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<sup>135</sup>Levin is helpful here: "The symbolic action [of Jer 7:9] is interpreted as a salvation-history allegory of Yahweh's close relationship to his people, the covenant formula from Deut. 26:19 being therefore cited, word for word." Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>It is fascinating in the Exodus narrative that the people were never intended to go up the mountain. But in Deuteronomy the narrative is filled out so the reason the people did not go up the mountain (though it was intended for them to do so) is because they were afraid of the fire on the mountain (Deut 5:5). These are not contradictory but complementary. That is why the phrase "is filled out" has been used.

10:4). Thus, the words given by Moses were audible for his immediate hearers and remained authoritative as they were written down.

### **Fresh Words from God**

While the covenant made with the forefathers was something that was to be in perpetuity, it is obvious that the people have broken it and called the curses of it upon themselves so that they are no longer YHWH's people (cf. Hos 1:9-10). Similar to what was spoken about above, there is a foretelling of a day when new words will be uttered by YHWH so that they will be planted in the heart (Jer 3:15-18). YHWH promises the people that he will give them shepherds who will teach them the words of knowledge and wisdom so that the ark of the covenant will fade into the background (v. 16). How is this permissible amnesia possible?

Chapter 26-31 answers that question. While the issue of the New Covenant cannot be answered adequately, here the point of this treatment is to show how God will speak to his people in an altogether *new way*. He will speak and they *will obey*. In chapter 26, Jeremiah tells the people that since they have not listened to YHWH's words (שָׁמַע used 3x in vv. 4-5) the land will become desolate (v. 6). The people seek to kill him and silence the words he speaks because he has spoken against the land (v. 11); he is spared due to past prophets, who had prophesied and their word came true.

In chapter 27, Jeremiah is told by YHWH to make a yoke and put it on his shoulders as a portent of Babylon's coming oppression (v. 2). Jeremiah preaches and foretells the coming disaster and challenges the words of the prophets in the court of the king. Further, he brings authority to his words by challenging the prophets to intercede for the people so that the vessels of the Temple will not be taken away, his words bearing

even more weight (especially to the *reader* of the finalized canon) because those false prophets' intercessions are empty, Ba'al-like pleadings.<sup>137</sup>

A prophet (chap. 28), Hananiah, takes it upon himself to prophesy peace, peace when there is no peace (cf. 6:14; 8:11). He says that within two years, God will restore the city to its former glory (v. 3). Although Jeremiah is sympathetic to the oracle, he reinforces the word that YHWH sent to him for the people. How could the people be sure that the word from the prophet was true. Instead of testing the word by other diviners and reading the stars, YHWH, himself, verifies his word and his prophet by saying that Hananiah will die within the year (v. 16); in the next verse, he dies. Scripture bears witness to YHWH's words by showing how effectual they are. What is more, the narrative which they relay attests to its own veracity.

Although in Exile, God would not let his word to Israel's fathers utterly fall; so they began to gather around themselves prophets who prophesied similar to Hananiah. In other words, they announced that God was going to restore the fortunes of Jerusalem (per Jeremiah's words in chapter 27), and thus the people tried to catalyze that restoration. The exiles knew that in order to bring about a renewed covenant, they had to gather prophets to speak the word of YHWH to them. Even in exile, however, they refused to listen to YHWH's prophet's words. They thought that by gathering prophets around them, they would not have to repent of their disobedience and deaf ears. They had affirmed only one aspect of covenant renewal—reading of the text—and had eschewed

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<sup>137</sup>For more on the prophet's role of intercession see H. Lalleman-de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), 217-24.

the other—obeying the text.<sup>138</sup> Two other criteria, then, surface by which the prophet’s authority was verified: (1) YHWH sent him (v. 9); and (2) his life was consistent with the words he proclaimed (v. 23).

The permanency of this new state of affairs is found in 30:9 where YHWH tells them that they will worship him under the leadership of a new David, who will be resurrected (מִקְוִיָּם).<sup>139</sup> This new covenant<sup>140</sup> is given more contours in the following chapter—YHWH promises to write his Torah on their hearts (31:33). This imagery of God’s handwriting harkens back to Deuteronomy 4:13 where God writes the ten words on two tablets (cf. 5:22). In this way, the terms of the new covenant will not be chiseled out through endless case laws, but they will be internalized so that God’s words dwell inside of his people. Thus, the people of God are able to heed the words of God because his words become part of their constitution. These words by the prophets do not merely attest to God’s actions, they are vital to be obeyed by all God’s people. These words are not to be obeyed insofar that they speak to the hearts of the people, they are to be obeyed because they come from the very mouth of God and his prophet. Once the words become internalized in his people, however, the city will be rebuilt (v. 38). Jeremiah’s work will be finished *then*, in that day! This internalization and obedience is guaranteed, not by the

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<sup>138</sup>Proclamation of the word of God would bring about order from devastation. This can be seen in the reforms of Josiah and the ministry of Ezra where both proclaimed the words of God at pivotal points in the life of Israel to bring about reform (Josiah) and institute a new order (Ezra).

<sup>139</sup>This verb in the Hiphil stem signifies an intensification (or, perhaps, a causative nuance) to the action of placing or appointing. Thus, while this author uses the word “resurrection,” he does so as a *double entendre*—intending future appointment and typological resurrection. God will raise up a king like David to rule his people. Poetically, this speaks of God’s resurrecting an actual Davidic figure to rule, and not just a political establishment.

subjective appropriation of the listener, but by the writing on the heart done by YHWH. Thus, God's words do not *earn* authority if they are obeyed. Rather, they are obeyed by virtue of them being spoken over the people and God's writing them upon the hearts so that they perform them. By virtue of God's transcendence and immanence, his word will be accomplished.

### **YHWH's Word Adjudicates Over All Cultures**

What gives Jeremiah the audacity to speak out against the nations that surround the Promised Land? Why should the other nations heed his warnings to them if YHWH is the tribal deity of the Israelites? The oracles spoken against the nations (chap. 46-51) are related to the new covenant YHWH would institute. Just as the covenant would be everlasting, so its purview would be expanded beyond the borders of Palestine.<sup>141</sup> Just as the borders given to the patriarchs were intended to be expanded, the borders for the returned exiles would encompass the surrounding territories. "Ancient Near Eastern empires enforced submission upon conquered territories chiefly through loyal vassals and provincial governors supported by force or the threat of force."<sup>142</sup> YHWH's vassal is the prophet who subdues with his words. In this way, oracles against

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<sup>140</sup>While the word *בְּרִית* is not used in this passage, covenantal language is unmistakable as we read in v. 22: "They will be my people, and I will be their God". Taken with the new David language, it is hard not to see covenant.

<sup>141</sup>This section is included since we are looking at how the word of God functions among his people. Since Jeremiah spends six chapters speaking out against other nations, it is only fair to ask how these oracles functioned in the ANE context. Further, when Jeremiah speaks against the pagan nations, it informs how God's people are to steward his words apologetically—which is treated in chap. 7.

<sup>142</sup>Norman Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 33. For more development of this in his work see pages 29-51.

other nations foretell a time when the land of Israel will encompass their enemies.<sup>143</sup>

Jeremiah is able to bring YHWH's words to bear upon Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, the Arabian tribes, Elam, and Babylon because they will be subject to God's covenant.<sup>144</sup>

To summarize two issues as it relates to those who are not currently in covenant with YHWH: First, in Jeremiah's "days" he speaks of in chapters 30 and 31, the nations will be subjected to the covenant as the territory of the Jews expands; since one of the primary roles of the prophet was that of a political figure.<sup>145</sup> In this way he is announcing a subduing of the nations that is to come. Second, even though the eschatological days have not arrived, all of these nations can be judged according to God's words by virtue of him being Creator of all men. That is, he is not a local deity who is confined to a certain piece of real estate in the Near East. Rather, every crevice and creature in the earth belong to him for he made it (cf. Ps 95:5).

### Canonical Considerations

While the prophetic train is essential in understanding God's self-communication through speech, the canon contains more than prophetic writings. As was

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<sup>143</sup>John Holladay Jr., "Assyrian Statecraft and the Prophets of Israel," *HTR* 63 (1970): 29-51.

<sup>144</sup>These oracles are not some rhetorical device used to show that "the entire breadth of Israelite society has been found guilty" since these are addresses to political states at the time of Jeremiah's writing. Carolyn Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremiac Prose* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 133. Jeremiah speaks to kings and generals of other nations and not a Diaspora of Jews.

<sup>145</sup>Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, 144. Reimer, through his synthesis of Jeremiah's book, the prophet is not merely a pro-Babylonian figure. While it is true, that Jeremiah tells the people to build houses in Babylon (as though it is where they are to live in perpetuity, this is an overly simplistic reading. There are both elements of goodness and horror for the Babylonians. David J. Reimer, "Political Prophets?"

discussed earlier, Scripture (from direct discourse in the Pentateuch to historical narrative in 1 and 2 Kings to liturgical example in the Psalms) is God's covenant document for his people. He tells them who he is and shows them what he has done in history and how his people ought to respond in repentance and faith. The Hebrew ordering of the canon places historical books in its enumeration of the Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings [in addition to who are already considered prophets by contemporary standards (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets)]. As was shown above, in YHWH's relationship to his people through his mediator Moses, God is utterly transcendent and unable to be beheld by fallen man; yet, he is graciously immanent so that he reveals himself and his purposes to fallen man—in order to have relationship with him. In what way, then, are books that comprise history to be considered God's Word? Too often man's conception of the Word of God is that it is high and lofty and disparate from the world in which he lives. It is ethereal and unknowable. However, by virtue of God's pervasive involvement in the lives of men, his Word is connected to history through even the mundane. The historical recounting of Israel's past is intended by God to define and remind the people who and whose they were. Not only were they redeemed from the land of Egypt, but YHWH fought on their behalf to fulfill his promise to Abraham to give his descendents the land of Canaan.

The book of Joshua in large part continues what the Torah inaugurated. Joshua is the new Moses. As YHWH was intimately involved in Moses' leadership, so also he was with Joshua to accomplish his purposes (Josh 3:7). Similar to how Moses is portrayed, Joshua also speaks the Word of YHWH; yet, YHWH's Word is given in the

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Political Exegesis and Prophetic Theology," in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel*, ed. Johannes C. de

words of Joshua (see Josh 3:9-10). Additionally, Joshua explicates YHWH's Word given to him.<sup>146</sup> This interplay between YHWH's work on Israel's behalf and Joshua doing all that YHWH commands as well as giving words of command to the people on YHWH's behalf continues throughout the text (Josh 4:8; 8:8, 27; 11:23; 20:1; 21:45; 23:5, 14-15). In short, the history book of Joshua serves as the actualization of YHWH's promises to Abraham and Moses. Yet, it is not a mere recounting of the facts of history. It recounts, but it also judges. All those who will not obey YHWH's written words will be cut off from the Land.

Bruce Waltke further summarizes, "The Bible is all about the irruption of the kingdom of God, which comes about through a covenant relationship between *I AM* and the nation of Israel. The book of Judges makes the argument that to be an effective tool in the hands of *I AM*, Israel needs a covenant-keeping king to shepherd them, not spiritually crippled charismatic warlords."<sup>147</sup> The irony of the book of Judges, as it pertains to be considered the inscripturated Word of God, is the abject absence of God speaking throughout the book. The absence of YHWH's voice is due to Israel's abandonment of her covenant, resulting in the land of Canaan not being inhabited. The silence of YHWH serves a vital part in the larger canonical apologetic for the critical need for YHWH to lead his people by his word.<sup>148</sup>

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Moor (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), 126-42.

<sup>146</sup>YHWH does not tell Joshua that the waters of the Jordan would divide, this was Joshua's enumeration of what would happen. Scripture, does not, however, indict Joshua for not speaking YHWH's words to the people.

<sup>147</sup>Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 588.

<sup>148</sup>A word that also appoints the king of Israel through his prophet Samuel. Not to mention there is only one occurrence of the formula in Judges (יְהוָה יִדְבָּק; 2:15), and contrasting Israel's rebellion with the presence of Moses and Joshua—where the formula was pervasive.

This absence is accentuated in the next book of the canon where the reader is told (that at the time Samuel was a boy) that the word of YHWH was rare in those days. God's Word and his representative (the prophet Samuel) are intimately tied together—forged in relationship. When Samuel tells Israel all the words of YHWH, he explicates Deuteronomy 17:16-20, so that Scripture gives YHWH's answer to the people's request. The prophet hearkens back to previous revelation as recorded by Moses. 1 and 2 Samuel lay the covenantal groundwork for the blessing of having a king appointed by YHWH (Gen 17:6; Deut 17:15; 1 Sam 16), not in accordance with the uncircumcised nations (Deut 17:14; 1 Sam 8:5-11). YHWH's word becomes prominent as salvation-history moves forward. He commands Samuel to anoint Saul (1 Sam 9). He tells Samuel that he has rejected Saul to be king (1 Sam 15). He chooses David to be king (1 Sam 16).

Nathan speaks for God when David sins with Bathsheba. Nathan spoke for YHWH (without having received a prior word from him) and condemned the actions of David. YHWH's Spirit revealed the incident to Nathan. No one told him about the secret conspiracy against Uriah (2 Sam 12:12), but Nathan has intimate knowledge of it. How could this be save for the inspiration of the Spirit?<sup>149</sup> The indictment he brings is not suspect to doubt, but is immediately heeded by David (2 Sam 12:13).

YHWH's prophet not only knows the secret things of the past, but is privy to the secret counsel of the Lord. Ahijah tells Solomon that the kingdom will be torn from him. The knowledge of the *eschaton* is known by the prophets because they have communed with the only God who knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10). Indeed,

the finite prophet is not able to conceive the future, but YHWH can impart this future to the prophet (and subsequently to the covenant people) whenever he wants. The mode of this revelation is through the appointed spokesmen. While it is not exhaustive knowledge (archetypal), it is true knowledge (ectypal).

### **Wisdom Literature and The Writings**

What follows is a very brief evaluation of the canon's wisdom genre needs to be treated in light of Scripture's self-attestation. As Francis Martin eloquently speaks about the Psalms: "As the word of God, the psalms bear us along into a dialogue with God as we make their words our own. Our journey towards an openness to dimensions beyond the reach of our instrumental reason is not so much a movement back as it is a movement forward, born along by the word of God which is both ancient and always new."<sup>150</sup> Sheppard says so much when he writes, "The same Word of God lies behind all parts of a book or all books in a collection, when historically neither the parts nor the books may have been written with such a consensus of meaning in the mind of ancient authors and redactors."<sup>151</sup> Indeed, the book of Psalms "is a lodestone of theological reflections."<sup>152</sup> Yet, they are more than mere reflections. They are more than inspiring

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<sup>149</sup>One could argue that someone probably told Nathan about the incident. This is not in the text and the doubter would have to argue from silence. Scripture shows that YHWH is on the move in the narrative through the agent of his prophet.

<sup>150</sup>Francis Martin, "The Word at Prayer: Epistemology in the Psalms," in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin Parry (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 61.

<sup>151</sup>Gerald Sheppard, "Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions," *Int* 36 (1982): 23.

<sup>152</sup>Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 870.

anecdotes.<sup>153</sup> The Psalms are Scripture in that they are God’s demonstration of how one worships him—by using his written word to guide the worshiper in fellowship with him. In God’s relationship with his creatures, he has ordained that they worship him. As we saw earlier, it is not only fitting but it is the only way for men to relate to their Maker.

Of particular interest are Psalms 1, 19, and 119. An exposition of these passages is not possible. Instead, a common thread of exalting God’s word and meditating on what he has said to men—particularly in his written word—dominates these three psalms. Psalm 1 brings assurance to the man who meditates on God’s written word—the Torah and the law (Ps 1:2).<sup>154</sup> Psalm 19 parallels Natural Revelation with Special Revelation so that the former is incomplete without the latter in light of man’s position (Ps 19:12-14). Psalm 119 is an extensive meditation on God’s written word that requires men to heed its teachings and direct their lives according to what God has said in its pages.

Given that God does not give propositions on how to live life disconnected from the world, the wisdom literature serves as the application of how God’s commands

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<sup>153</sup>William J. Abraham says the following: “Many Christians have felt it odd to suppose that inspiration should have suddenly dried up and stopped with the closing of the canon; as if God suddenly called a halt to his inspiring activity. In this they are surely correct. . . . I see no reason why we cannot today be inspired by God just as people of old were inspired by God. By exposure to his saving and revelatory acts in the past, by radical openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, and diligent, sincere, and regular use of the classical means of grace, God will inspire us in the present to proclaim the Gospel, to live out its demands in the world, and think out its implications for our understanding of the issues and problems of our day and generation. . . . Through his mighty acts of the past and through his continued activity in the present God continues to inspire his people.” William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981), 71-72.

Further, Abraham suggests that the historical books are important to the canon because they record facts of history so that “the central theme of the Pentateuch is the relationship between God and man.” *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>154</sup>Used in parallel speaking of the same reality.

are to be lived out in a fallen world. God speaks in time and space.<sup>155</sup> Proverbs gives general statements of why men are to live in accord with the Torah taught to them by their parents. It serves as a visceral reminder of why one wants to live according to God's Torah rather than follow the paths of the wicked who forsake God's Torah. Underlying the book is the assumption that God has given these piercing insights. As Waltke says,

Agur makes no attempt to validate by human reason Scripture's absolute claim for its reliability and canonical authority and perfection. If such an attempt were made it would make limited human reasoning the final arbitrator of truth, turning the argument back on itself and of necessity once again ending in skepticism. The finite mind can neither derive nor certify infinite truth. Certain truth is found in the Scripture's themselves as the Holy Spirit certifies them to obedient children.<sup>156</sup>

Song of Solomon was debated as to its divine origin given its sensuality. It also, like Proverbs, serves as a vivid picture of God's intention for a man's love toward a woman. By extension, it helps Israel understand the intense love YHWH has for Israel. Not that it is an extended metaphor, where there is 1:1 correspondence in the expressions of love displayed in the Song. Rather, it enables Israel to understand the passion and affection between man and woman. This, in turn, provides a framework for the affection YHWH has, and how Israel was to respond in kind.

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<sup>155</sup>Compare Mowinckel who says that "the prophets stand with both feet in the midst of a *concrete historical situation*, speaking to their contemporaries out of it and the tasks that it imposes." Mowinckel, *The Old Testament*, 27. It must be noted that Mowinckel's exegesis goes awry when he asserts that Jesus and the apostles "discarded and transformed" the words of the OT. Further, Mowinckel wrongly believes that inerrancy entails absolutism, eternality, and unchangeability. This is largely due to his failure to apply typology in the NT's use of the OT (ibid., 28). As a result, he concludes that the religion of Israel and Christianity are in flux, as history and culture and geography change (ibid., 33). It is true that both religions are rooted in history, but this does not mean that the old is abrogated. Jesus and the apostles understood their role as fulfilling, not doing away with revelation that preceded. As a result, such misguided assumptions and conclusions lead to sheer pietism that is not rooted in Scripture but in the reader's response to what he reads.

<sup>156</sup>Bruce Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 920.

Ecclesiastes (written by the divinely appointed king, Solomon) uses his life as a tragic warning to any who would seek fulfillment outside of YHWH's Torah. Pleasures in this life are fleeting and we would do well to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Eccl 12:13). The same kind of real life picture is given in the life of Job. God's seeming absence is just as important to the book as his responses to Job at the end of the text. In this way, God seeks to encourage his people to live in light of the unseen. Even when he seems aloof, he directs the winds and waves.

Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles serve as an apologetic for covenant truthfulness. That is, Ruth and 1-2 Chronicles look to the historical David and an eschatological David who will be the recipient of the forever *hesed* of YHWH. Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah shows how God's purposes will not be cut off. In the face of threats to his promises of deliverance from Babylon and a holocaust, his people will return to the land promised to Abraham.

### **Conclusion**

In light of this brief treatment of the OT as God's self-attesting and written word to his people, a few threads can be drawn together by way of conclusion. First, God spoke to the patriarchs and attempted to speak directly to Israel from the mountain. Since they were too fearful to listen to his voice, he appointed Moses to ascend the mountain to commune with him, receive words written by the finger of God, and deliver YHWH's teaching from the mountain and from the Tabernacle to guide the people. When questions arose as to whether anyone should believe Moses' words had divine authority, God intervened with signs and wonders to give credence to his representative. Second, while it is true that God's words (by necessity) are delivered in a particular culture, a particular

language, and through particular people, it is also true that God expected the people to obey those particulars from the time of the Wilderness Wanderings on through the Babylonian Exile. This is what the prophets call the people back to: to obedience to the Torah. Third, God's representative is to be heeded just as if YHWH were standing in front of the people delivering the message. Again, the prophets are the quintessential picture of this—i.e., Jeremiah's sermon at the Temple (Jer 7) and Hosea's pursuit of Gomer. Their interaction with YHWH serves Israel in that they can eavesdrop on an intimate communion they would not otherwise be privy to—i.e., Habakkuk's questioning of YHWH and Joel's distress at the locusts. Fourth, these relationships between the exemplar and YHWH allow the reader to set his life against the backdrop of what faithfulness looks like, and repent accordingly—i.e., the wisdom and historical literature—so that God's people would know what it looks like to live faithfully in a fallen world. This is to say, the Writings and Historical pieces of the Hebrew canon serve as practical (and historical) markers for the people of God. They can see that to live in obedience to God receives blessings; whereas as to disobey receives the curses of the covenant. In this way, the promises and warnings found in the Torah find their fleshing out in the historical recounting of Israel's faithlessness and the remnant's obedience.<sup>157</sup>

Swain succinctly states, "As the Word incarnate ultimately came that his Father might become our Father (Jn 20.17; Gal. 4.4-7), so too, Holy Scripture was written that this

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<sup>157</sup>It is often interpolated that the speaking of God is more authoritative than Scripture's record of the history of God's people. The historical record, thus, gets minimized in authoritative stature. It is this author's contention that the historical record has equal authority because it lays claim to God's faithfulness in bringing the blessings in cursings to pass. Further, they provide a theological framework by which readers can follow the trajectory and expectations of eschatological fulfillment. This is highlighted by the way the canon itself is laid out as an open book—waiting for the New David to appear. For more on the

sovereign, saving purpose of the incarnate Word might be achieved. God communicates his incarnate Word (Jesus Christ) through his inscribed word (Holy Scripture) for the sake of covenantal communication and communion.”<sup>158</sup> It is with this incarnate Word the next chapter deals.

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Hebrew canonical structure see Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

<sup>158</sup>Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 60.

CHAPTER 5  
NEW TESTAMENT PROTOCOL FOR AUTHORITY  
AND INSCRIPTURATION

Having looked at the OT conception of authority with the foil of Moses and the prophets, as well as a brief view of the OT's origin and authority, it is necessary to follow the trajectory of Scripture's self-attestation in the NT. As was seen in the previous chapter God has complete authority over his creation. He is utterly transcendent and exists independently of creation. His self-knowledge is complete and is graciously and truly imparted to his people through his finite representatives. He appoints representatives to teach all that he commands them.

The OT serves as the paradigm for divine authority in the NT.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is the representative *par excellence* (Col 1:15-20). The author of Hebrews makes evident that Jesus' ministry was better than the prophets because of his ontological superiority as the Son—the effulgence of God's glory and the imprint of his hypostasis (Heb 1:3; χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ). As H. C. G. Moule has written, “[The Epistle] does not elaborately travel up to Him through general considerations. It sets out from Him. It makes Him the base and reason for all it has to say. . . . Its first theme is not the

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<sup>1</sup>See Terence E. Fretheim, “The Authority of the Bible and the Imaging of God,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 49. Fretheim argues from a deductive argument for the authority of the NT through the authority of the OT.

community, but the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> It is not merely that Jesus is the foundation for all that will be said in the epistle to the Hebrews, but when Jesus came he brought all the prophetic words to their fitting fulfillment. As F. F. Bruce has written,

It is ‘in these last days’ that God has spoken in him, and by this phrase our author means much more than ‘recently’; it is a literal rendering of the Hebrew phrase which is used in the OT to denote the epoch when the words of the prophets will be fulfilled, and its use here means that the appearance of Christ ‘once for all at the consummation of the ages’ (9:26) has inaugurated that time of fulfillment.<sup>3</sup>

Further, Jesus’ testimony concerning himself makes it evident that someone greater than previous prophets (John 5:36-39), priests (Luke 6:5), and kings (Luke 11:31) has arrived.

This chapter will elucidate the NT data and draw the connection between the Mosaic economy and Jesus’ fuller revelation, peculiarly evidenced in the epistle to the Hebrews,<sup>4</sup> as well as God’s self-revelation as depicted in John’s gospel. The line of

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4. <sup>2</sup>H. C. G. Moule, *Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Filiquarian, 2010),

<sup>3</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 46.

<sup>4</sup>This is not the place to enter into a lengthy discussion of the canonical heritage of the epistle to the Hebrews. For the purposes of this work, suffice it to say that there were considerable attempts to link authorship of the book to Paul. This is due to the apostolic criteria for the canon. The book was never *not* recognized by the church, save the fourth century Cheltenham Canon, which was an omission and not an indictment on the book because this has to be presumed and not proven (such an omission, not an indictment against, also takes place in the Muratorian Canon). That is, the original Cheltenham canon merely speaks of thirteen epistles of Paul, but the exact number of lines is not given. Additionally, there seems to have been an exacting purpose by the compiler so that there would be twenty-four witnesses to the OT and twenty-four witness to the NT; following his OT list he writes: “Sed ut in apocalypsi Iohannis dictum est: ‘vidi XXIII seniores mittentes coronas suas ante thronum.’ maiores nostri probant, hos libros esse canonicos et hoc dixisse seniores. Item indiculum novi testamenti;” [on-line], accessed 1 July 2012; available from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/cheltenham.html>; Internet. Further, Cheltenham is of unknown origin and it is expected that this list was compiled for more fanciful reasons rather than with didactic, ecclesial purposes in mind. The quandary for much of the dispute surrounding the canonicity of the book of Hebrews reside in not knowing who the author was. Yet, the church had recognized it as authoritative as early as the Syriac Peshitta and Eusebius. Its use as a standard for life and doctrine was catholic and in accord with the apostolic teaching. The splendor of its salvation-historical teaching, particularly its use of typology, would have led many to believe that Paul had written it. See Stephen Vororwinde, “The Formation of the New Testament Canon,” *Vox Reformata* 60 (1995) [on-line], accessed 7 November 2012; available from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/voorwinde1.html>; F. F. Bruce *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 25. What is telling is the fact

argument will start with the OT's conception of God's prophets speaking on his behalf, and the necessity of obeying the elected representative, moving to the person and message of Jesus, his appointment of representatives, and the criteria by which these men were recognized by the church to speak authoritatively on behalf of the Lord. This chapter will seek to show that the self-witness of the NT is based upon the person and ministry of Jesus.

The assumption of the NT is that God has visited his people in a fuller way, not by a tabernacle of cloth, but in a tabernacle of flesh (εσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Jesus' supreme authority as portrayed in Scripture (as interpreter and τέλος) authenticates the supreme authority of Scripture itself. That is, what is known about Jesus (both the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith) is known because of Scripture's portrait of him. This, however, is a very important step removed from a Barthian conception. That is, all that is known about the Word of God incarnate is given by the Word of God inscripturated. The very thing that Barth scoffs at, namely containing God in a book, enables him to interact with God. Given what was discussed in the previous chapter, the prophets served as stand-ins for YHWH himself. So also with the apostles, they were considered to teach Jesus' people all that he wanted them to teach. By the empowering of his Spirit, they would impart all that God wanted them to write. Their words came with divine authority because of their appointment by him and because of the Spirit's leading

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that the church never denied the canonicity of Hebrews, but individuals had doubts about its apostleship, and therefore about its canonicity. This was not the case universally, however. See Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 229-38; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010)

<sup>5</sup>Contrast Psalm 78:60 and John 1:14.

them into all truth (John 16:13). To disobey the words as recorded in the canon was to disobey God.<sup>6</sup>

### Jesus as Revealer

One of Karl Barth's greatest contributions to contemporary theology is his re-emphasis on the person of Christ. Barth understood that Jesus, God-incarnate, was *the* prime example of God's revelation to man. Particularly, he viewed Christ as *the* revelation of God. What is unfortunate, however, is that Barth viewed God's revelation as the Christ. He writes, "Primarily and originally the Word of God is undoubtedly the Word that God speaks by and to Himself in eternal concealment."<sup>7</sup> Barth distinguishes between three modes of God's self-revelation: proclamation,<sup>8</sup> Scripture,<sup>9</sup> and Christ.<sup>10</sup> Both proclamation and Scripture are authoritative insofar that they point to and inhere in the Christ—God's self-revelation. Holy Scripture "is obviously not primary, but secondary. It is itself the deposit of what was once proclamation by human lips."<sup>11</sup> How then is the Bible to be reckoned as revelation for Barth?

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<sup>6</sup>More on this below.

<sup>7</sup>Barth, *CD* 1.1, 191.

<sup>8</sup>"Proclamation is human speech in and by which God Himself speaks like a king through the mouth of his herald, and which is meant to be heard and accepted as speech in and by which God Himself speaks, and therefore heard and accepted in faith as divine decision concerning life and death, as divine judgment and pardon, eternal Law and eternal Gospel both together." *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>9</sup>"The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which fulfills proclamation or through the proclamation fulfilled by revelation." *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>10</sup>"Understanding the Word of God not as proclamation and Scripture alone but as God's revelation in proclamation and Scripture, we must understand it in its identity with God Himself. God's revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God." *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

We do not accept it as a description of our experience of the Bible. We accept it as a description of God's action in the Bible. . . . The Bible, then, becomes God's Word in this event, and in the statement that the Bible is God's Word the little word "is" refers to its being in this becoming. . . . The Bible is the concrete means by which the Church recollects God's past revelation, is called to expectation of His future revelation, and is thus summoned and guided to proclamation and empowered for it.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Scripture is God's revelation insofar that it points the eyes of faith to God's actions in history—preeminently in the Incarnation.<sup>13</sup>

This convolutes the Bible's own presentation of its authority—its written and covenantal nature. The person writing the letter of petition or command or consolation or praise is surely revealing facts about himself. The recipient is called to do something with that revelation. In the same way, God's written record should also be included under the umbrella of event. For by his Spirit, God's word was written by his amanuenses and is part of the contemporary believer's experience with God when he reads the covenantal document.

The root of his view of Scripture is Barth's view of God.<sup>14</sup> While he most certainly affirms God's sovereignty *over* history, it appears that he cannot affirm God's

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>13</sup>This is important to the issue of Scripture's self-witness because Barth affirmed God's self-witness, but denied such witness to Scripture. The onus of one's understanding of Scripture's self-witness is integrally tied to God's witness to himself—as will become more evident in the following chapters. That is, the historical witness of the church and Scripture itself claims that what Scripture says, God says; what God says, Scripture says. So Gerhard Maier writes, "Revelation claims to have issued forth from God's Spirit. This revelation, in the context furnished by both Old and New Testaments, is God's address to us. Whoever hears it is hearing first of all not the human authors and witnesses to faith but rather than triune God. Nowhere else can such a trustworthy and adequate message from this God be found. As unique speech from God, it has a unique, incomparable authority. God has bound himself to his word. He has determined that it is the location where he will encounter us. He will vindicate and fulfill this word in every way. The authority of Scripture is, fundamentally, the personal authority of the God who encounters us there." Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 1994), 177-78; also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 287.

sovereignty *through* history.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the concursive theory of Scripture avoids Barth's ugly ditch by affirming that God can speak his words in human words. As O'Donovan says, "Holy Scripture is a part of God's own self-attestation in deed and word. It is not a secondary reflection on it, which, had it not occurred, would have left God's message about himself intact. In speaking of Scripture, then, we properly speak of the voice of God as well as of the voice of its human authors."<sup>16</sup>

All language is contextual and bound within a particular culture. Thus, God's words were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Since he is Lord of creation and history, his breathing into authors cannot be precluded due to man's finitude or sinfulness. Instead, God uses these clay pots to accomplish his self-revelation to man (Isa 29:13-16). This does not mean that his words were dictated and recited robotically by prophets (any substantial study on the ministry of the prophets will reveal this; Job 38-42; Pss 6:3; 13:1; Isa 22:1-15; 40:6; Ezek 37:1-10; Jonah 1:1-3). Nor does God's revelation through human authors deny the personality of the author (Isa 8:1-3; Lam 1:15-16; 3; Hab 1:1-2:1). It is unfortunate that so many theologians claim that inerrancy issues are too concerned with science and not enough with ethics. That is, they claim that

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<sup>14</sup>One's view of Scripture is directly related to his view of God. See Stephen Joel Wellum, "An Investigation of the Interrelationship between the Doctrines of Divine Action, Sovereignty, Omniscience, and Scripture and Its Significance for Contemporary Debates of Biblical Authority" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996).

<sup>15</sup>John M. Frame wrote a fine essay on this issue titled "God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence," in *The Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 159-77. For a favorable synopsis of Barth's view of this relationship between event and Scripture see Bruce L. McCormack, "The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism," in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 55-75.

inerrantists want indubitable propositions and are not concerned with what it means to live in the world. They believe inerrantists reside in a sterile ivory tower and need to come down into the real world.<sup>17</sup> Men like Robison James have argued for a relational sense of Scripture in affirming its authority.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, this is visiting the Barthian quagmire of *what* is Scripture.

It is true, the primary concern is the *who* of Scripture—namely, *God* has authoritatively spoken. It is, however, a grave mistake to make a dichotomy between the *who* and the *what* of Scripture, as though they were mutually exclusive.<sup>19</sup> As has been shown above, Jesus’ entire life was informed by Scripture—down to the iota and the smallest stroke. A trajectory of Scripture is not all that is in view for Messiah. From his birthplace (Matt 2:5-6) to his riding on a colt (Matt 21:2-7) to his garments being divided among his executioners (John 19:24), Jesus’ *eimi* to the smallest detail of his life were given by Scripture. Any first-year Hebrew student can see the importance of having a text

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<sup>16</sup>Oliver O’Donovan, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 167. Thus, God’s inspiration itself is an act of salvation.

<sup>17</sup>See R. Alan Culpepper, “Jesus’ View of Scripture,” in *The Unfettered Word: Confronting the Authority-Inerrancy Question*, ed. Robison B. James (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 26-38.

<sup>18</sup>Robison B. James, “Authority, Criticism, and the Word of God,” in *The Unfettered Word: Confronting the Authority-Inerrancy Question*, ed. Robison B. James (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 78, 86.

<sup>19</sup>Herman Ridderbos writes: “The authority of the Scriptures is the great presupposition of the whole of the biblical preaching and doctrine. This appears most clearly in the way the New Testament speaks about the OT. That which appears in the OT is cited in the New Testament with formulas like ‘God says,’ ‘the Holy Spirit says,’ and so on (cf., for instance, Acts 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 6:16; Acts 1:16). What ‘the Scripture says’ and what ‘God says’ is the same thing. The Scripture may be personified, as a certain confusion in current speech between ‘Scripture’ and ‘God,’ the outgrowth of a deep-seated conviction that the word of Scripture is the Word of God. It was not ‘Scripture’ that spoke to Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17), or gave his great promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), but God. But ‘Scripture’ and ‘God’ lay so close together in the minds of the writers of the New Testament that they could naturally speak of “‘Scripture’ doing what Scripture records God as doing” (B. B. Warfield). And this naturally implies authority. “It is written”

and testimony that supports a faith worthy of acceptance. The difference between a  $\pi$  and a  $\pi$  is seemingly insignificant, but a confusion of the two could be devastating.<sup>20</sup>

Barth and Culpepper are surely correct when they say, “We understand and interpret the message of Scripture in light of the revelation in Jesus.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus, however, is not a subjective, plastic foil that can be used as a mask for not accepting the plain meaning of the texts. That is, in all these discussions of biblical inerrancy, appeal is made to Jesus—that he was not concerned with such modern notions of errors in the text. It seems highly unlikely, though, that Jesus would afford the same flexibility for his commands. Instead of commanding his disciples to go into the uttermost parts of the earth being literal, Jesus would be using hyperbole to say that his message of love and tolerance is really important. Paul, surely did not take this to be the case as he was compelled to go to Spain (the uttermost part of the world on his map).<sup>22</sup> A clearer understanding between freedom and constraint, as pertains to God’s Word and Jesus’ authority, is stated by Peter Jensen:

The Lord who has set us free in order to bind us to himself is the Lord of love. It was by accepting the limiting condition of servanthood that he achieved salvation for his servants. In doing his work he was bound by promises already given, by a covenant already made. His own faithful character bound him to give himself, not only in becoming a servant but in the most telling unfreedom of all: incarceration, the tying of his hands and crucifixion. And yet this unfreedom was the perfect example of his freedom to do what needed to be done for the ones he loved for his own glory.<sup>23</sup>

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(γέγραπται) in the New Testament puts an end to all contradictions.” Herman Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and Its Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 20-21.

<sup>20</sup>For example  $\eta\eta\eta$  means “to conceive” and  $\eta\eta\eta$  means “to burn with anger.”

<sup>21</sup>Culpepper, “Jesus’ View of Scripture,” 26.

<sup>22</sup>Not to mention that this same view of missionary endeavor was shaped by the OT prophets—see Isaiah 66:18-24.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 151.

Jesus' authority is no less than that of YHWH who graciously revealed himself in the OT to Israel. Due to his having set his people free from Egypt, he demanded obedience. In the same way, Jesus' liberating man from his bondage to sin demands obedience. And this is why at his resurrection and vindication he tells his disciples that *all* authority had been given to him (Matt 28:18). This divine authority serves as the ground for why they must go out, baptize, and teach all the words of Jesus. "The authority of Scripture is the personal authority of the Lord over the people whom he has saved. . . . Its didactic function is exercised in the context of relationship with God; it is shaped by the knowledge of the God who [speaks]."24

### **Jesus' Authority**

The Pharisees knew that Jesus was speaking with a different authority than their own. Indeed, he was not merely expositing texts but was demanding that people obey him. Undergirding Jesus' entire ministry is his authority. If he has no authority, then his words carry no weight. Although Jesus did not have formal training he clearly had teaching authority (Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:36). He had authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6-8). He had authority to execute judgment (John 5:27). All these kinds of authority attest to who he is ontologically speaking; for God alone does these things (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21).

The authority inherent in the Scriptures is owing to the fact that God has spoken them. When speaking about Scripture's self-attestation, it is not merely a document affirmed as authoritative. It is a document that is an extension of God's speech.

Numerous times Jesus makes it clear that he is equal with God. He and the Father are one—a charge of blasphemy would be out of order if he was not making a claim to divinity (John 10:30; cf. John 17:11, 22). Before any of his hearers were conceived, before even their father Abraham existed, Jesus was living (John 8:58-59; again, no need to charge with blasphemy if there was no claim to deity). If these claims to deity are true, then the implication that his words carry unequalled authority is easy to see—for this was the ground upon which Holy Scripture stood, the self-revealing God.

The chief priests and elders challenged his authority by asking where it had come from (Matt 21:23-27). Jesus answers with a question: “From where did the baptism of John come? From heaven or from man?” There are only two answers (as John himself testified; John 3:27). The correct one, as alluded to in the text, is that it came from heaven. The implication, then, is that Jesus’ authority to heal and cleanse the Temple came from heaven as well. In Mark’s gospel Jesus cleanses the Temple because it was written that “my house shall be called a house of prayer” (Mark 11:15-19). In other words Jesus was cleaning out his house from the perverse activity, an initiative only YHWH could exercise.<sup>25</sup>

John’s gospel develops this theme even more. Jesus repeatedly says that his authority to speak and demand obedience stems from his relationship to the Father. Jesus said, “My teaching is not mine, but it is from the one who sent me. Whoever desires to do his will, he will know from where the teaching comes, whether it is from God or if I speak from myself. The one who speaks from himself seeks his own glory. But the one

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 154-55.

who seeks the glory of the one who sent me, this one is true and there is no unrighteousness in him” (John 7:16-18). These words that Jesus speaks come from what the Father has taught him (John 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). Jesus makes special appeal to his relationship with the Father. The very name he uses denotes this relationship (Father and Son). Particularly, he is so intimately related to the Father that he can speak of YHWH being in him and he in YHWH (John 14:10-11).<sup>26</sup>

Jesus’ testimony hinges on his origins. The Father sent him; thus Jesus’ authority is grounded in the Father’s authority (John 8:28-29; he who needs no witness).<sup>27</sup>

After making this claim, John tells us that many believed in him. The narrative then turns to these fresh disciples. What would it be that Jesus first teaches them? He tells them to abide in his words—*his* words. As a good rabbi, if he was a mere rabbi, Jesus would have pointed to the holy Torah of YHWH as being the object of the disciples’ devotion. However, he points to *his* word.

The freedom Jesus promises to those who keep his word is the same result of YHWH’s words in the old covenant. God’s word sent Moses, which relayed a message to Pharaoh, which resulted in the exodus from slavery. This heightens the irony of the Jews’

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<sup>25</sup>Notice that the reinstatement of right worship by Hezekiah was initiated due to God’s Word being dusted off and read. His word is what cleansed the foul stench of the people (2 Chr 34:14-15).

<sup>26</sup>Note also the relationship between words and works in this passage. The works Jesus performed were not just some action performed by him in order to gain notoriety in his day. The works he performed were directly linked with YHWH’s activity in the OT—to free people in bondage (1 Sam 12:10), to heal (Deut 32:39), to teach (Jer 31:34), and to speak with authority (for there is no higher authority).

<sup>27</sup>This being true, it stresses the hard-heartedness of the Jews to receive the Father’s Law.

words when they say that they had never been enslaved to anyone (v. 33).<sup>28</sup> Although this is absurd that they would make such claims (so Carson),<sup>29</sup> it explains why Jesus presses into the spiritual nature of his indictment against them of slavery to sin (vv. 34-35). Jesus says he speaks what he has seen the Father doing while they do what they have heard from their father (v. 38; connecting works and words).

Although affirming that they are children of Abraham (v. 37), Jesus pursues the heart- issue of pride and obstinacy. Like the woman at the well, he leads the conversation to a point of confrontation between religion and obedience to the Father's commands. The Jews take the bait. They claim, "Our father is Abraham" (v. 39). Yet Jesus draws a contrast between their words and their deeds. Although Jesus speaks the true and actual words of God, they seek to kill him. They try to direct the spotlight away from their sin toward the supposed sexual immorality of Jesus' origins (v. 41). Jesus is unrelenting.

The Jews prove that they are not really Abraham's seed because they do not rejoice at Jesus' word. Abraham (their supposed father) believed God's word and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3).

Jesus asks, "Why do you not understand the things I say? Because you cannot hear my word" (v. 43). "To raise the question why they cannot hear would only be to show a lack of understanding that in this sphere being able to do something and willing to do something are one and the same. For the being of the unbeliever is constituted by the will to unbelief. What he *wills* is determined by this *being*, and he *cannot* will any

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<sup>28</sup>Contra Carson who sees this as a spiritual slavery; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 349.

differently.”<sup>30</sup> Not hearing Jesus’ word is not hearing God’s Word (v. 47). They pored over Scripture in search of life (5:39), yet avoided Jesus’ life-giving words (v. 52; alluding to God’s life-giving words in Gen 1; Ezek 37; Mal 2:5). Jesus incarnates YHWH’s Law. Moses came down from Sinai with tablets. Jesus came down from the mountain, as it were, of God’s presence (“from above”) to deliver himself to his people.

Schnackenburg says, “He is not called the Logos absolutely because he utters the word or words of God; on the contrary, his words rather have the force of God’s words because he is the Logos, that is, the divine revealer and redeemer.”<sup>31</sup> Harris writes, “The Johannine Jesus speaks and acts in a way that necessitates throughout the divine origin which is declared in the prologue at the outset.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Jesus’ being and his word are inextricably linked just as YHWH and his covenant were tied together. The Jews reject his word (and person), opting for traditions of men.<sup>33</sup> They rejected the covenant Lord, choosing Caesar (John 19:15; cf. 1 Sam 8:7).

### **Jesus’ Authoritative Words**

“And now I am coming to you and this I speak in the world in order that they might have my joy completely among themselves. I gave them your word and the world

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 349-50.

<sup>30</sup>Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1971), 317; italics in the original.

<sup>31</sup>Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 483; for more discussion on the development of Logos in the OT and second Temple Jewish literature (ibid., 484-93).

<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>33</sup>This continues as Stephen attests in his execution (Acts 7:51-53).

despised them” (John 17:13-14a). The words Jesus imparted did not originate from himself, but from his Father in heaven. And yet Jesus lays impetus on his words so much so that not heeding them will bring death (John 5:24; 8:51). Jesus equates his testimony to that found in Holy Scripture (John 5:47). This is even more blatant in Matthew’s gospel where Jesus affirms the authority of Scripture by saying that heaven and earth will pass away before the tiniest mark passes away from Scripture (Matt 5:17-18; ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς ἢ γῆ). And at the end of the gospel Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words do not pass away” (ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσεται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρέλθωσιν; Matt 24:35; cf. Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33).

Jesus, again, places his words on the authoritative level of Scripture in John 5:47: “If you do not believe [Moses’] writings, how will you believe my words.” It is not that Jesus is merely putting his words on par with Scripture, he claims that Moses wrote about him. That is, before Jesus was born, the Law had been pointing forward to him! It is clear that Jesus was messianically self-conscious.

Jesus demands that his words be obeyed. In view of the Last Day, Jesus makes obeisance to his words the criterion for whether someone will be considered righteous or not. John 12:47-48 speaks of the two epochs of Jesus’ ministry—earthly and cosmic. He says in verse 47: “Whoever hears my words and does not keep them, I do not condemn him.”<sup>34</sup> For I did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it.” This is a weighty claim indeed. He came to save the world. Who could save creation other than the Creator of it? He goes on in verse 48 to say (in light of his cosmic rule): “The one who

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<sup>34</sup>“Condemn” has been chosen as it fits textual links with John’s previous use of κρινῶ in 3:17.

rejects me and does not receive my words already has a judge. The words I have spoken will judge him on the Last Day.” In light of his previous claim that the person who keeps his words will never taste death (John 8:51), Jesus is equating the judging power of his words with those of Torah in Deuteronomy 30:11-20. YHWH told Israel that whoever kept his words (הִרְבֵּךְ; v. 14) would live long in the Land. If they did not heed his words, they would be cursed and die.

Jesus again places his words at the same level of covenant fidelity as those of YHWH in John 14:23-24. He says: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him. And we will come and we will make our dwelling place with him. The one who does not love me does not keep my word. And the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the one who sent me.” This theme of loving and keeping is tied to YHWH’s speech to the people in Exodus 20:6 (cf. Deut 5:10; 7:9), which speaks of the Lord’s inherent desire to show *hesed* to those who love and keep his commands (מִצְוֹתַי וְלִשְׁמִרָתִי לְאַהֲבָתִי וְלִשְׁמִרָתִי). This phrase is a metonymic representation of covenantal fidelity (and not a one-time usage) as is evident in Daniel’s use of the coupling of אָהַב and שָׁמַר in Daniel 9:4. To love and keep YHWH’s commands is to be in covenant with him.

Finally, the clearest linking of Jesus’ words with those of YHWH are found in the High Priestly Prayer of John 17 and is the pinnacle of Jesus’ words as they relate to God’s. Jesus says, “I have made known your name to the men you gave me out of the world. They are yours, that is, the ones you gave, and they have kept your word” (v. 6; cf. vv. 8, 14). They have kept *God’s* words and Jesus had told them previously that they must keep his (that is, Jesus’) words (8:51-52; 12:47-48). Jesus had also said that his words were God’s words (14:23-24). He does not mean that he is merely repeating God’s

words already recorded in Scripture, this is clear from the actual words the apostles record. Rather, Jesus is giving weight to his words by showing that when he speaks, it is the very word of God.<sup>35</sup>

One implicit mention of Jesus as the embodiment of God's words is found when John 17:17 ("Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth [ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν]") is coupled with Jesus' statement in John 14:6 ("I am the way and the truth and the life.") Each one of the nominatives Jesus uses alludes to the Word of YHWH in the OT: "way"—Psalm 119:105;<sup>36</sup> "truth"—Psalm 19:9;<sup>37</sup> "life"—Deuteronomy 32:47; Psalm 119:25, 107.

### **"But I Say . . ."**

Brief comment must be made about Jesus' understanding of the OT as it is reported in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5-7). The entire exposition is set in light of Jesus' comment that not one iota or tiny mark will be abrogated by anyone (5:18). So the contrasts he sets up cannot be between his words and the OT. Rather, Jesus is bringing to bear the original meaning and heart of the OT text. This does not mean that his commentary carries no authority and is merely his own interpretation. His exposition lays claim to his belief that his interpretation was the authorial intent of the OT, because he bears the authority of the author—he is the author. As Pinnock notes:

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<sup>35</sup>As Richard Bauckham, in his *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), argues that Jesus and the New Testament writers identify Jesus, the Lord, with YHWH, the Lord.

<sup>36</sup>Not to mention the perpetual way of referring to how one should live his life—he must live his life according to the word, the word of God leads, it guides, and many other allusions to paths.

<sup>37</sup>Not to mention Jesus' own attribution that God's word is truth.

It was something other than negative biblical criticism. It was rather the extraordinary authority which he assumed for himself in contradicting traditional interpretations and setting forth in no uncertain terms the correct, divine meaning. . . . What offended [the Jewish leaders] was his claim to be God's last and most eminent messenger, the one whose life and teachings constituted a new and final revelation to consummate the old.<sup>38</sup>

What an offense, indeed! The preeminent scribes and teachers of the OT were having their interpretations superseded by Jesus' self-justified, correct exposition. Only one who is greater than Abraham (John 8:53), Jacob (John 4:12), Moses (Matt 19:7-8), Solomon (Matt 12:42), Jonah (Luke 11:32), John the Baptizer (Luke 7:24-28), the Temple (Matt 12:6), and all men (John 13:16; 15:20) is able to give an authoritative word that is greater than that of any man.

### **Jesus' Commands as God**

Jesus is able to judge because he rightly understands and obeys the commands of God—for this is the criteria by which men will be judged. The commands of God are an expression of God's being.<sup>39</sup> What is particularly interesting about Jesus' use of this is that he has been given a commandment by the Father—what to say and what to speak (John 12:49). What is more, Jesus' authority to lay down his life and to take it up again is a commandment he received from the Father (John 10:18). But it is not just Jesus' receipt of a command to give his life and to speak his word that makes him utterly unique as

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<sup>38</sup>Clark Pinnock, "The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 211.

<sup>39</sup>In this way Euthyphro's Dilemma is answered: God's law is right because God is right himself; there is no outside law to which he must conform.

Torah incarnate.<sup>40</sup> It is his *addition* to the commands that Israel already had that caused people to remark that he spoke with authority—unlike their religious leaders. Thus, the new covenant people of God are given a further command by their Mosaic Messiah. They are commanded anew by Jesus to love one another as he has loved them (13:34). This flies in the face of Bultmann’s thesis that *Logos* incarnate is merely subjective. Jesus clearly gives an objective piece of law here. If Jesus were not the Law of God made flesh then he would not be able to issue forth a new command. For if he did so, apart from his essence, he would be no better than the Pharisees who added to the Scriptures. They had no authority. They had received no commands from YHWH. They were Satanists by virtue of their work and word.

### **Jesus’ Work Authenticates His Words**

Jesus’ beloved disciple makes the connection between Jesus’ words and Scripture when, in reference to Jesus’ foretelling of his crucified exaltation, he says in 2:22b: “[the disciples] believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus spoke.” In other words, Jesus’ words were deemed worthy of belief in the same way the Jewish Scriptures were deemed. Jesus spoke of his crucifixion and resurrection in light of the course that Scripture had laid out for him. As Pinnock says,

It is safe to say that his whole life was conditioned by what he understood biblical prophecy to be saying about the coming messiah. Time and again he uses a phrase such as, “the “[sic] scripture must be fulfilled” (Lk. 22:37, Mt. 26:56, Lk. 4:21,

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<sup>40</sup>“Which is grounded in the relationship of mutual knowledge and love between Jesus and his Father.” Paul Meyer, *The Word in the World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 231. Also Ryan P. O’Dowd, who writes, “This eschatological climax of ‘torah’ is appropriated in John’s gospel to give permanent actualization to torah: the ‘Word’ made flesh.” Ryan P. O’Dowd, “Memory on the Boundary,” in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin Parry (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 20.

etc.). The reason why these prophecies had to occur by a kind of divine necessity was because they were God-given utterances recorded in God-inspired Scriptures.<sup>41</sup>

Not only do the gospel writers labor to show that the OT was being fulfilled by Jesus' life and ministry, but Jesus himself is constrained to move and act in accord with what Scripture demands ethically as well as prophetically. France concurs,

While second to none in his reverence for the Scriptures, his diligent study of them and his acceptance of their teaching, and while employing an exegesis that differed from that of his contemporaries generally only in a closer adherence to the original sense where misunderstanding or misuse was the rule, he yet applied the Old Testament in a way which was quite unparalleled. The essence of his new application was that he saw the fulfillment of the predictions and foreshadowings of the Old Testament in himself and his work.<sup>42</sup>

Jesus was not just commenting on the Scriptures, he was blatantly claiming that they were commenting on him (John 5:39).

From his birth (Matt 1:23) to his resurrection (Luke 24:26), Scripture governed Jesus' life. Just like the OT prophets, Jesus' authority and ethic (in perfect accordance to the covenantal document of the OT) authenticated his words. His work and words are integrally tied so that one is unable to verify one without the other. Jesus' perfect life as portrayed in the gospels substantiates his claim to have perfect and true words.<sup>43</sup> Since Jesus' life was directed by the inerrant word of God, he lived without error.

### **Jesus' Words Better than Moses' Words**

This tight link between Jesus and his Father is unmistakable. What is more amazing about Jesus' claim to have derived authority is the mixing he does between what

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<sup>41</sup>Pinnock, "The Inspiration of Scripture," 206-07.

<sup>42</sup>R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1971), 223.

YHWH says and what he says (reminiscent of what was observed in the OT prophets in the previous chapter). John affirms this when he adds his editorial, “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34). After all, John the Baptist reminds us that the Spirit descended on Jesus and *remained* with him (John 1:32). This is not merely quantitatively distinct from the old covenant, but this abiding of the Spirit upon Jesus marks him as qualitatively different from those who spoke YHWH’s words. As Ramm has written,

His word is to be accepted as authoritative because He is *The Logos* and because He is *The Truth*, for being The Truth He is an absolutely veracious person. His authority is not that He is a religious genius, but the Son. He is not the most sensitive of religious souls, but the Son. He is not the most perceptive of the prophets, but the Son. He is the Son and this is His authority, and this is the ground for His demand for absolute obedience.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than Jesus replacing the Torah of Moses, Jesus’ word is one and the same with Moses (John 5:47). Moses’ word points to the one who was to come after him (Deut 18:15). In fact Moses longs for the day when the Spirit will be ushered in without measure. And so this is part of Jesus’ ministry—ushering in the age of the Spirit through his word and work.

Yet, Jesus’ ministry of the word is utterly distinct from the Mosaic train of prophets. The author of Hebrews takes great pains to show that Jesus is not merely the Prophet *par excellence*. His ministry is better than that of Moses because he is the Son of God. That is, the Old Covenant was mediated through a person; in the person of Jesus, God the Son speaks directly to the people without a mediator. He writes, “Long ago, at

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<sup>43</sup>Compare the relationship between the two when the preacher of Hebrews links the character of God with his words (Heb 6:13-20).

many times and in many ways, God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets, in this end of these days he has spoken to us by a son” (Heb 1:1-2a). It is not merely that he has spoken by God the Son, he has given us a qualitatively different manifestation of his word. It has been imparted via son-speech. Similar to the way the prophets were physical representations of YHWH for the covenant people, Jesus is God’s representative for the new covenant people. The Son, through whom the entire cosmos was created, ministers a better word than angels.<sup>45</sup> The abiding nature of the Spirit evident in Jesus’ life abides in all those who have claimed Jesus as their Covenant Head.

When Jesus loses a large band of disciples in John 6 due to his vulgar language, he tells us that it is the Spirit who gives life. “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (v. 63). Thus Jesus’ word gives life—reminiscent of YHWH’s words bringing life to dry bones (Ezek 37). Peter sees the relationship between Jesus’ life-giving words and those of YHWH when he asks, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 69). Jesus’ word and the Spirit are inextricably linked as are YHWH’s word and the Spirit whom he sends to give life to Adam and to Ezekiel’s dry bones. This intermingling of words is most profound in John 12:47: “And whoever hears and does not keep my words, I do not judge him. For I did not come in order to judge the world, but in order to save the world.” It would seem that Jesus does not judge

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<sup>44</sup>Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 47; italics in the original.

<sup>45</sup>Köstenberger and Swain write, “A striking feature of John’s Gospel is that, after the prologue, Jesus is never again called ‘the Word’. Instead, John prefers to describe Jesus under some denomination of sonship (e.g. Son, Son of God, Son of Man etc.)” Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 113.

anything; yet he judges truly (5:30; 8:26). And so Philo's connection between the word of God and judgment makes it clear why Jesus even mentions judgment.<sup>46</sup>

### **Jesus: The Prophet to Come and His Word**

John's prologue to his gospel presents one of the highest Christologies imaginable. Of particular interest to this study is his employment of Jesus as the Word of God incarnate. John is not simply using a Hellenistic concept of reason to win a hearing. His theology is rooted in OT background; the very first words echo the first words of the Tanakh so that his hearers will immediately think of God's powerful word at creation.<sup>47</sup> Jesus is God's creative, authoritative word incarnated.<sup>48</sup> John begins his account of Jesus' life by appealing to the eternity of this one who was made flesh and tabernacled among us. More than this, he uses the word *Logos* as if a proper noun for the Messiah.<sup>49</sup>

John marks out a distinction between the economy of Moses and that of Jesus. That is, Moses gave the gift of Torah whereas Jesus was the gift. Raymond Connell puts it well: "The law was a gift separable from the agent by whom it was given. Since grace and truth came not only 'by' but also 'in' Jesus Christ, it is embodied in him and

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<sup>46</sup>"Until that acute judge of all things, the word of God, coming in, separates and distinguishes what is probable from what is true, and the middle from the extremities, and what is second from what is placed in the first rank." Philo, *A Volume of Questions, and Solutions to Those Questions, Which Arise in Genesis*, 3:23.

<sup>47</sup>So C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 337.

<sup>48</sup>Barth's understanding of Jesus as Revealer and the Word of God (as distinct from the written Word) will be discussed below.

<sup>49</sup>For an excellent historical analysis of the word *logos* see Peter Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 73-142.

inseparable from his person. Thus, Moses is the mediator through whom God gave the law, but Jesus Christ is himself the source of grace and truth.”<sup>50</sup>

In the same way that God gave manna that Moses mediated, so he is the origin of his words. Jesus, however, moves in emphasis when he declares that *he* is the Bread of Life that came down from heaven (John 6:35, 41, 48). Jesus equates himself with the manna given by God. What is more, Jesus tells his hearers that he is not merely manna but the incarnate word of God—manna and Torah are linked in Jewish tradition.<sup>51</sup>

Not only was the law a light unto someone’s path, but also it was the means by which someone would find life.<sup>52</sup> It is not strange that Jesus would promise life to those who adhered to his words. When they confronted him, the Jews understood this connection and scoffed at his claim of authority (equal to what Scripture gives) so they attacked his ethic: his youthfulness, his origin (insinuations of being a bastard), and his lack of formal education. Jesus does not flinch at their charges. He asserts that his words carry life because of his works and heavenly origin.

### **The Mosaic Economy**

Before delving into the matrix that John constructs regarding Jesus’ authority as the life-giving Torah of God, it is necessary to look at how he begins his construction. In his prologue, John tells us that “grace in place of grace” (χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος) came

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<sup>50</sup>Raymond Connell, “A Study of the Logos Doctrine in the Fourth Gospel” (ThD. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1951), 89.

<sup>51</sup>John Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 31. See also J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 104.

<sup>52</sup>See A. T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (New York: Hendrikson, 2005).

through Jesus' fullness (John 1:16). "The picture here portrayed is 'grace' taking the place of 'grace,' like the manna fresh each morning, new grace for the new day."<sup>53</sup> That is, the gracious Mosaic law was interpreted by a further (and more complete) expression of YHWH's grace to his people.<sup>54</sup>

This Mosaic law was mediated by Moses (διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη). However, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο). Whereas Moses gave (ἐδόθη) what he received, the very gift of life comes (ἐγένετο; "came into being") in flesh. Further, John uses "grace and truth" (χάρις . . . ἀλήθεια) as an advancement beyond the old covenant's "everlasting mercy and truth" (רַחֲמִים . . . אֱמֶת). In other words, the ministry of Jesus is greater than Moses because God is his own intermediary between himself and men.

This interplay between Jesus and Moses is affirmed by three comparisons between their ministries. First, Moses had never seen God, but Jesus is God the Son. Both in John 1:18 and in John the Baptist's ministry, as a preparation for the Lamb of God (who takes away the sin of the world), Jesus is superior to Moses—who relayed God's message of substitutionary atonement through a lamb and who only saw God's backside.

Second, Moses prophesies Jesus' coming and ministry. Lest anyone think that there is a chasm between Moses' grace-filled ministry and that of Jesus, he is reminded

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<sup>53</sup>Connell, "A Study of the Logos Doctrine," 88.

<sup>54</sup>"His people" does not necessitate speaking of Israel. Rather, since God is creator of all that lives he has a claim on all that is. Therefore, when John speaks of the Word enlightening every man we need not understand that God's grace only extends to those who are in covenant with him through circumcision or faith. Additionally, the word "interpreted" was used instead of "replaced"; because, as will be shown in the conclusion of this paper, a replacement theory is not acceptable to a proper understanding of John's interplay between Moses and Jesus.

that Moses himself looked forward to the day of Messiah (John 1:45; cf. Deut 18:15).

Third, as Connell said above, the gift is inseparable from the giver.

The grace and truth (= “new law of Christ”), which came through Jesus’ mediation, is an overflow of his ontology.<sup>55</sup> The law was separable from Moses because he merely received and dispensed what he received—whether it is the law or manna (cf. John 6:35).<sup>56</sup> Jesus makes this explicitly clear in chapter 6. The Jews grumbled against him, demanding a sign from him to prove his authority. They sight Moses’ feeding of the people in the wilderness with manna (the irony is thick as Jesus had just finished feeding five thousand men). Jesus corrects them by saying that Moses did not give the manna, but his Father had given it. Further, all those who ate of the manna from Moses’ hand died. But those who feast on Jesus will never be hungry or die. Thus, the gift of Messiah is greater than physical bread (John 6:52-59).

John Pryor proposes that this manna is metaphor for Torah. He cites the “long tradition of reflection which identified the manna upon which Israel fed in the wilderness with both Torah and the wisdom of God.”<sup>57</sup> Also, he draws the connection with typical Jewish homiletic and exegetical patterns in using quotations. He also notes the importance of John’s mention that it was near the time of Passover. All these seem to

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<sup>55</sup>See Carson, *John*, 129-30, 133-34; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 41-44; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 90-95, 98-100.

<sup>56</sup>See also Robert Horton Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 23.

<sup>57</sup>Pryor, *John*, 31. See Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*, 3.175-77; idem, *Decalogue*, 1.118; idem, *Who Is Heir of Divine Things*, 1.191; idem, *On Flight and Finding*, 1.137, 25. Martyn also proposes a thesis that Jesus’ being lifted is comparable to Moses’ ascending the mountain to receive the Law from

point to John's knowledge of the lectionary cycle of Jewish tradition—supporting the relationship between Jesus' words and Moses' manna.

Thus, Jesus not only speaks words, which need to be heeded because of his superior ministry to Moses, but he is the very word of God that must be obeyed. Harris believes that Jesus' relationship to Moses and Torah is a minor point. She goes so far as to say that v.17a could be removed altogether because it is not supported in the rest of the Gospel. She says, "Moreover, Moses is introduced along with 'the law', but nothing further is said about this law nor about Moses in his character of lawgiver."<sup>58</sup>

What is Jesus' relationship to Scripture? Jesus is the one to whom the prophets and Moses looked forward (John 1:45; 5:39). Belief in Jesus' words is equivalent to belief in the OT Scripture (John 2:22). In fact, Jesus' words are verified by the promise of YHWH's words in the old covenant. If you do not believe the OT scripture, then there is no way to believe Jesus' words (argument from the lesser to the greater; John 5:46).

Lest anyone claim that Jesus was a Jewish upstart that sought to undo the OT system, John makes it clear that Jesus affirms and uses the OT to support his mission (John 6:45; 7:38). This failure to see that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic expectations of the OT is highlighted in John 7:42 when the Jews abdicate their research.<sup>59</sup>

John the Baptist correctly taught Jesus' origin as it related to his ontology (John 3:31). And Jesus countered the Jews by pointing out that they are from below,

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YHWH "to receive a heavenly vision" and find life. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 104. For a very helpful study of John's use of typology between the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant see *ibid.*, 118-28.

<sup>58</sup>Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 64.

<sup>59</sup>For they claim that he is a Galilean, but do not go any further to find out where he was born. After all, a claim to be Messiah would need to be verified by birthplace. Thus, their rebuttal of Jesus' origin becomes an indictment against their malice and sloth.

while he is from above (John 8:23). And finally before Pilate, Jesus links authority with origin (John 19:11). Pilate only had authority because it was given him—the recipient from earth, the giver from above. Thus, Jesus’ claim to be from above places him in his proper seat of authority—to forgive sins (cf. Mark 2:7) and to give eternal life.

His words give this eternal life. Belief in Jesus demands that one obey his words (3:36). Knowing that it is YHWH who Jesus claims to have come from, there is an implicit equivalency between God’s authority and Jesus’ words (see above). What did Jesus do? He manifested the Father’s Name to the world—drawing those who belonged to him and who kept his word (John 17:6). Since Jesus is from above, his words and actions carry authority. He gave the world the Father’s word (John 17:14). How?

Jesus’ divine origin gives him authority to speak. Indeed, his words have power unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 7:29). He is able to speak with full authority because he is God and knows the mind of the Father (sharing in his nature; John 1:18).<sup>60</sup> Like the prophets of the OT, Jesus has been sent with a message. Unlike these prophets, Jesus’ origin (from heaven) is paramount in his authoritative statements.<sup>61</sup> From another perspective, Jesus is the archetype of the apostles since he is the true Sent One from God.<sup>62</sup> As a result of his divine authority received at his resurrection, Jesus is able to give authority to his sent ones to speak the word of God to the uttermost parts of the earth. “No one has ever seen God at any time; save the only-begotten God (μονογενῆς

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<sup>60</sup>Merrill Tenney, *John: The Word Made Flesh* (Atlanta: Baptist Literature Board, 1985), 11.

<sup>61</sup>See Simon Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 83-189 for an excellent treatment of the “I have come” sayings of Jesus as they relate to his divinity and preexistence.

θεός), who is at the Father's side, this one has made him known (ἐξεγήσατο)" (John 1:18). As Sadananda puts it, "The mutual involvement of the Father and the Son, their word and their work are the keynotes of the Johannine revelation of God."<sup>63</sup>

Again, von Balthasar says,

The word of scripture is the Word in the mode of contemplating his own action, recording and elucidating it, something which can only be performed properly and perfectly by the Word himself, since God alone compasses the entire range of his revelation; and only he can assign a valid human expression for it. The word of revelation is primarily the Son, who speaks of the Father through the Holy Spirit . . . . At first sight therefore the two lines of the testified and the testifying Word seem to run parallel, but this appearance is deceptive. For both forms of the Word are ultimately the one Word of God testifying to itself in the one revelation.<sup>64</sup>

The revelation of God is no longer the reflection of the prophets on their visions and verbal communication with YHWH. Instead, it has come fully and directly from the revelation the Son offers in the Incarnation.<sup>65</sup> Barth was correct that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God in that he embodied the word of God in flesh. He misreads,

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<sup>62</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 3:24-35.

<sup>63</sup>Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God: An Exploration into the Johannine Understanding of God* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 88.

<sup>64</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 11-12.

<sup>65</sup>This does not mean that the OT and other words are not authoritative. It only means that they have authority from God. He breathes the words into the prophets, and they respond by preaching. Jesus is the very Word of God and embodies this *theopneustos* so that his words and works embody all that the Torah had pointed toward. This author's view is what Wellum calls the Received View or the concursive theory of inspiration. He explains: "There is a direct identity between what God says and what Scripture says and as such, Scripture is God's infallible and inerrant Word. How does the Received View justify such a strong claim? The answer is quite simple: proponents of the view construe God's providential activity in the world similar to the evangelical view. In other words, they view God as one who is able to accomplish his will through worldly means. After all, on the evangelical view, God is viewed as the royal king in control of history, and as such, when it comes to the production of Scripture, he is able so to superintend the process of composing the Scriptures that the end result manifests his divine intention, without error. And even more: God is able to do all this without destroying the freedom of the human authors." Wellum, "An Investigation," 66. For a popular portrayal of this view see John H. Gerstner, "A Protestant View of

however, the relationship between holy writ and Jesus when he denigrates the OT witness as though it merely pointed toward revelation so that it only has derivative authoritative.<sup>66</sup> There is an assumption that Barth has that man is unable to write things that have divine origin. Even more, man is unable to speak about the incomprehensible. This is true apart from God's self-revelation to man. According to Barth, Jesus is *the* revelation of God. All men are able to do is point to the God-man. He merely gropes in the dark when he seeks to confine the divine to words and sentences. Jesus, however, did not speak of the authority of the OT in this way. He submitted his entire life to it and spoke of its full authority *as the written word of God*.<sup>67</sup>

A point that is implicit in Barth's view between written Scripture and Jesus is correct—namely, the hermeneutical priority of Jesus in order to arrive at the *sensus plenior*<sup>68</sup> of Scripture. Although the Scripture is clear, there is a prior need for redemption from false presuppositions—what Augustine called faith seeking understanding. Van Til says,

The willing disobedience on the part of man is itself the greatest damage done to God's creation; it is this that must be repaired. This cannot be done unless creation is really seen as God's creation and man is really seen as the creature of God. It is

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Biblical Authority," in *Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspan (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 42-63.

<sup>66</sup>See Karl Barth, *CD* 1.1, 131. He later says, "We must maintain that it is not self-evident or intrinsically the same thing, that revelation is to be regarded primarily as the superior, the Bible primarily as the subordinate principle." *Ibid.*, 128. Since the weight of Barth's understanding of revelation falls under the area of event, he is able to say that the Bible "becomes" the Word of God. *Ibid.*, 111-24. For a fine analysis of the relationship between Barth's view of God and Scripture see Wellum, "An Investigation," 69-100.

<sup>67</sup>See J. I. Packer, "*Fundamentalism*" and *the Word of God* (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 55.

<sup>68</sup>What is the fuller meaning of the text of Scripture? All Scripture points to and testifies to the Messiah (John 5:36-47; Rom 10:4). See Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 86-87; Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's, 1955), 92.

only if man is the creature of God that he can be saved by God. Salvation means that man, the sinner, must be brought back to the knowledge of himself as the creature of God and therefore, to the knowledge of God as the Creator. Being a sinner, man will not read nature aright unless he does it in light of Scripture.<sup>69</sup>

Unless man has his eyes opened to the reality of his sinful condition, then he is unable to read nature and Scripture correctly. As mentioned before, the main problem is man's suppression of what is clear in the Scriptures and nature. He wears sin-tainted glasses. He must have these removed through forgiveness of sins before he can see rightly. This is one way Jesus is God's final authoritative word (Heb 1:1-2) in that through his work men can be saved from their bondage to sin (and their subsequent blindness).<sup>70</sup>

Similar to the OT prophets, the Spirit is integral in his ministry as the Word. Just as the Spirit rested on Ezekiel during his prophecies, so too the Spirit rests on Jesus throughout his ministry.<sup>71</sup> This perpetual resting of the Spirit is a testimony to Jesus' origin. That is, the Evangelist comments on Jesus' relationship to God, "He who God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit immeasurably" (John 3:34). This is said in light of John's previous comment that the one from above bears testimony to things from above—what he has seen and heard (John 3:31-33; 8:55). The link between Jesus' ontology and praxis is made clear.<sup>72</sup> Persons from above need no authentication

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<sup>69</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 113.

<sup>70</sup>So also O'Donovan, "The Moral Authority of Scripture," 166.

<sup>71</sup>Note the qualitative difference in the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit with that of the prophets and kings. The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism and remained upon him until he was killed. Whereas the prophets spoke at incongruous times since the Spirit had not breathed into them.

<sup>72</sup>Robert Gundry, "Matthew," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 29-30.

outside themselves. They are the highest authority. This is why the Father is the one who verifies and testifies to the Son's authenticity and authority (Luke 9:35; John 17:1). As Van Til said, "The self-contained God is self-determinate. He cannot refer to anything outside that which has proceeded from himself for corroboration of his words."<sup>73</sup>

Jesus also prophetically authenticates himself by foretelling his future crucifixion (Mark 8:31; 9:30; 10:34). Even when the disciples rebuked him for the doom he spoke about, he rebuked them for their lack of faith (reminiscent of the prophetic interplay with Israel). Not only did he speak of the future (and it came to pass), but he also called the people to a closer scrutiny of their own lives so that they would live in covenant fidelity. He appealed to Scripture throughout his ministry. His repetitive reply to questions was, "What does Scripture say?" He chided the teachers of the Law because they did not know the Scriptures (Matt 21:42; 22:29). He pursued the Cross because it was already written in the Scriptures (Matt 26:54; Luke 24:27; John 19:28). He is the quintessential prophet who not only foretells the future and calls the people to obedience to YHWH, but he excelled them by having words of his own authority to speak. Even more, he demanded obedience to YHWH's word and to himself.

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<sup>73</sup>Cornelius Van Til, introduction to *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 36. He goes on to say, "The mind of man is itself in all of its activities dependent upon and functional within revelation. So also it is, as already made clear, with respect to the material that confronts it anywhere. All the facts are through and through revelational of the same God that has made the mind of man. If then appeal is made from the Bible to the facts of history or of nature outside the Bible recorded in some documents totally independent of the Bible it must be remembered that these facts themselves can be seen for what they are only if they are regarded in the light of the Bible. It is by the light of the flashlight that has derived energy from the sun that we may in this way seek for an answer to the question whether there be a sun. This is not to disparage the light of reason. It is only to indicate its total dependence upon God. Nor is it to disparage the usefulness of arguments for the corroboration of the Scripture that comes from archaeology. It is only to say that such corroboration is not of independent power. It is not a testimony that has its source anywhere but in God himself. Here the facts and the principle of their interpretation are again seen to be involved in one another.

Jesus' authentication is even greater in that he claims the Scriptures that the prophets wrote down testify to him (John 5:39). Their ministries were services rendered to him! Essentially, he claims he is greater than even Elijah.<sup>74</sup> In John 5 Jesus is confronted about his healing of a lame man on the Sabbath. He answers his interlocutors by saying he only does what his Father does. In fact he claims he is owed honor equal to the Father. His words, like the Father's, are able to impart life (John 5:24). Jesus' authority is also eschatological in that on the Last Day he will call forth the dead to judgment and execute that judgment—an action reserved for YHWH alone.

### **Incarnation as Fulfillment**

Why did God send the *Logos* into the world to save it? The Lord gives out his Spirit without measure—and the one upon whom the Spirit abided was Jesus. There was a hopeful expectation that Messiah would be anointed with the Spirit of God.<sup>75</sup> He is able to establish the new Davidic kingdom by virtue of this anointing.

Not only monarchical in its purview, but the words of the prophets were confirmed by God's spirit inspiring them to speak, act, and write down the words of God (so Ezekiel; cf. 1 Pet 1). John confirms this when he makes the connection between the one whom God sends, his words, and the Spirit being given without measure (John 3:34).

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Thus the modern and the orthodox positions stand directly over against one another ready for a head-on collision." Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>74</sup>The Baptist is portrayed as the new Elijah who prepares the way for the Greater.

<sup>75</sup>The relationship between anointing of the Spirit and Messiah is too large of a topic to deal with here. For further study see Darrell Bock, "The Son of David and the Saints' Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment," *BSac* 150 (1993): 451-56; also William Dumbrell, "The Content and Significance of the Books of Samuel: Their Place and Purpose within the Former Prophets," *JETS* 33 (1990): 54-57; also D. Brent Sandy, "John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu," *JETS* 34 (1991): 456-60.

Jesus' word carries authority when asked to remedy the wine shortage at the Cana wedding, Mary tells the servants to do whatever he told them (John 2:5).<sup>76</sup> Not to make too much of this, but notice that the medium of the sign is Jesus' word—albeit accomplished by the servants.<sup>77</sup> He fulfills the longing of the OT for the new wine to pour forth as blessing for God's people and judgment for his enemies (Isa 25.6; Jer 13:10). Again, the healing of the official's son is accomplished by the mere word of Jesus (John 4:50), establishing him as greater than Elijah and Elisha who also rose children from the dead—who never did so from a distance.

John makes it clear that Jesus had a mission while on earth. He came to fulfill the Scriptures—to make the seeing blind and those hearing deaf (12:38); to be betrayed (13:18; 15:25); drinking sour wine by his enemies (19:28); to have unbroken legs (19:36). However, it is not these minute details alone that he came to accomplish. OT expectation was written down about the Coming One. Israel heard about a coming covenant when God's law would be put in her heart. Jeremiah relayed God's message that there would come a day when he would place a new spirit in his chosen people and they would have the law etched on their hearts (Jer 31:33).

In the Pentateuch YHWH draws a connection for us to understand Jesus' program. He says in several places that those who love him will keep his commands/statutes (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; 7.9; 11:1, 13). At the end of his ministry Jesus tells his disciples that they love him if they keep his words/commands (John 14:23). Further, he tells his disciples that his words will abide in the one who loves him (cf. John

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<sup>76</sup>See also Gundry, *John the Sectarian*, 15.

15:7). Should this be read as some loose connection? Hardly. Jesus is making it explicit that whoever is part of this new covenant will have his word etched on their heart like Jeremiah foretold.

And so, the *Logos* of God not only reveals the Father, but he also is the plumb line for what it means to be in the New Covenant. His teaching, which his disciples were reminded of by the bearing up of the Holy Spirit, is the rule of faith and practice for all those who love YHWH. It is Jesus' words issuing forth from his essence that give the defining characteristics of what it means to love God this side of the cross. In other words, the content of faith in Jesus is not some nebulous subject. It is, rather, the very words of Jesus—those he affirmed (the OT) and those he lived (Incarnation).

### **Incarnate Word and the Inscriptured Words of the New Covenant**

Given the brief discussion above from Kline and Blenkinsopp, regarding the inscription of divine, covenantal words, the apostolic band recorded the life and ministry of the Word for the same reason. The relationship Jesus has with the Father parallels the Paraklete's relationship with the Son—namely, he speaks the words he hears from the Son (οσα ακουσει λαλησει) and he is sent by the Son (εγω πεμψω; John 16:13; 15:26 respectively). The words that he speaks will bear witness to the Son. Those that have been with Jesus from the beginning are vindicated to be his true witnesses by the Spirit.<sup>78</sup> Thus, those that saw Jesus and heard him (reminiscent of the visions the OT

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<sup>77</sup>The narrative takes on a metaphorical flair when the servants are told what to do and then are sent out to provide the new and better wine. Thus, Jesus is shown to be as YHWH to his prophets.

<sup>78</sup>The main criterion to be an apostle was that the witness had to have been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to the Resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).

prophets had) received authority from him to bear witness to him. None of them from the biblical testimony had been writing down all that Jesus had been doing. The Helper was sent by Jesus to remind them of his life and ministry (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

In this way, the apostles serve as the New Covenant scribes, writing down the authoritative life and words of Jesus for all those that are his.<sup>79</sup> These witnesses went into the uttermost parts of the earth to herald the New Covenant that Christ ratified in his blood. Paul says this much when he says: “And because of this, we continually praise God that when you heard the Word of God from us, you did not receive it as the word of man but just as it truly is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13). Consequently, Paul is equating the testimonial words of the apostles with God’s words.<sup>80</sup> As Frame explains,

By their own oral teaching, the apostles could preserve the memory of Jesus’ words for only one or two more generation. A written record would seem to be the only way in which generations of believers after the apostolic period would have access to Jesus’ words. Without a written record of them, and of the apostles’ testimony to them, those words would be lost to us forever. . . . After Jesus’ ascension, they presented their preaching their preaching and teaching as the word of God, given by Christ through the Spirit, not by any human source. . . . The documents themselves claim that they have full authority over their recipients.<sup>81</sup>

As in the OT, so in the NT, Jesus commissions the apostles to write so that they would provide a covenantal document by which his people would know him, his

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<sup>79</sup>Paul Wegner says, “[Hebrews 1:2] clearly states that God has spoken to us ‘in his son’ and not simply ‘by his son,’ the implication being that Jesus was sent to earth as God’s final revelation. God also ensured that the life and teachings of Jesus were written down in order to preserve them accurately and consistently.” Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 23.

<sup>80</sup>Edith M. Humphrey offers a substantial study on the relationship between vision and speaking as authenticating the NT authors. Of particular note is her study on Paul’s ministry supported by 1 Corinthians 12; *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 31-56; esp. 37-48. Similar to the OT prophetic visions, Paul authenticates his ministry as a witness to the risen Christ from his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1 Cor 9:1).

<sup>81</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 130.

words, and obey his words. Merely because they are written does not diminish the authority by which they come. To disobey the king's written edict, is to disobey his spoken edict, is to disobey him.

It is not just that the apostles spoke the covenantal word, but they also wrote letters for its perpetuity. Just as the OT Law, Prophets, and Writings were read in the synagogues, so also the words/letters of the apostles were meant to be read to guide and teach the covenant community its ethic (Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27). Peter makes clear this unique relationship the apostles had to the Risen Lord when he says to Cornelius that only those Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection were considered his witnesses (Acts 10:41; cf. 13:26). Just as Jesus had been the Sent One from the Father, he empowered his apostles to be sent so that they would bear witness to him. Their authority was given to them as the heralds of the covenant. As R. Laird Harris so clearly states,

The New Testament is both the authoritative source book of doctrine and also our earliest and best source book on the life of Christ, His teaching, and the work of His immediate followers. The first conclusion that can be established from the undoubted and earliest records is that portions at least of the New Testament were written with the expectation that they were to be received and obeyed.<sup>82</sup>

### **New Testament Witness to the Old Testament**

In light of the previous chapter, it would be beneficial to see just how the NT viewed the OT. Did Jesus and the apostles believe in a bifurcation between God's actions/speaking to Israel and the written text they possessed? It is clear that Jesus and his

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<sup>82</sup>R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 219-20. For a thorough study of Paul (as an apostolic writer) and the canon see Stanley E. Porter, "Paul and the Process of Canonization," in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 173-202. For treatment on the issues of texts and authority see Lee Martin McDonald, "Wherein Lies Authority? A Discussion of Books, Texts,

apostles use the OT as normative for their own life and doctrine.<sup>83</sup> Matthew’s Gospel is replete with fulfillment formulae that shows that Jesus’ life and ministry served to “fulfill that which was spoken by . . .” (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9).<sup>84</sup> It is important to note that Matthew did not differentiate the spoken word from the written word he was quoting, for he uses the λέγω verb to reference the written word of the prophets. The authority of God extended to his word, written.

Jesus, himself, viewed the OT as the guide by which he would live, minister, and die. He never treated it as a plastic text, but conformed his life to the foretelling and purposes contained in it. He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (a merism signifying the entirety of the OT—from the Torah to the Nabi’im; Matt 5:17).<sup>85</sup> Upon his declaration of his arrival in the Temple, Jesus reads Isaiah’s scroll, which gave the Messianic mission of declaring, healing, and freeing—and declares that “this Scripture has been fulfilled” (Luke 4:21). Similar to both Matthew and Mark, Luke uses the Scripture-fulfillment motif as bookends to his Gospel (Luke 4:21; 24:44; Matt 5:17; 26:56; Mark 1:15; 14:49). In other words, they serve to show at the beginning and end of Jesus’ life, all that happened in between were in light of his fulfilling of the OT. In tandem with Matthew, Jesus tracks his wonder-working, betrayal, and death as being constrained by the OT. Jesus could have stopped his murder, but pressed into it because

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and Translations,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 203-39.

<sup>83</sup>See John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

<sup>84</sup>Each of these instances use the phrase “in order to fulfill what was spoken” (ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν), with the exception of the final passage which uses the aorist passive indicative rather than the subjunctive—the other instances follow a ἵνα, which requires a subjunctive to follow.

<sup>85</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 113-14; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 181.

the Scriptures mandated it. “Therefore, how were the Scriptures fulfilled (πληρωθῶσιν), in this way it is necessary to be this way. . . . And all of this has happened in order that the scriptures of the prophets were fulfilled (πληρωθῶσιν)” (Matt 26:54, 56; cf. Mark 14:49).

The apostles also verify the divine character of the OT when they teach that its words are of divine origin. Peter gives the OT more surety than his own eyes (2 Pet 1:19). It is not as though the OT prophets merely observed God’s mighty acts and interpreted those actions for the people (2 Pet 1:20). Rather, the prophets were carried along (περομενοι) by the Holy Spirit and spoke from God (ελαλησαν απο θεου; 2 Pet 1:21). John Owen writes,

All such evasions are precluded, the supposition wherein a self-evidencing power is granted. What greater miracle did the apostles of Christ ever behold, or hear, than that voice that came υπο της μεγαλοπρεπουσ δοζης, “from the excellent glory”—“This is my beloved Son?” Yet Peter, who heard that voice, tells us that, comparatively, we have greater security from and by the written Word than they had *in* and *by* that miraculous voice.<sup>86</sup>

Paul also believed that the OT was useful, not merely because it made one wise unto salvation. This was a result of the divine initiative of inspiring men to write his words (2 Tim 3:16)—“All Scripture is God-breathed and beneficial. . . .”<sup>87</sup> Paul said that *all* of the Scripture—from the amazing accounts of YHWH’s promises and deliverance to

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<sup>86</sup>John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 317.

<sup>87</sup>More treatment will be given to this all-important passage below. I opted for the traditional “God-breathed” translation of θεόπνευστος, following Warfield’s extensive treatment of the word. He concludes, “What is θεόπνευστος is ‘God-breathed,’ produced by the creative breath of the Almighty. And Scripture is called θεόπνευστος in order to designate it as ‘God-breathed,’ the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead. . . . It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built.” Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1948), 296. See also Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, 156-62.

the particulars of the Levitical code to the recounting of the kings of Israel's idolatry. All of it. Not one stroke has priority over another.

### **Canonical Consciousness of the New Testament**

Given the nature of Jesus' fulfillment of the OT promises, the gospel writers and writing apostles are self-aware of their progressing of God's divine revelation. As Wolterstorff has written, "To be accepted into the canon, the book has to possess apostolicity. . . . There's a canonical impulse within the New Testament books; canonicity is not some fate which befalls them from the outside."<sup>88</sup> Like the prophets of the OT, the apostles saw themselves as building upon the covenant through their writings and remembrance of the life and fulfillment of the Christ. Paul expects the churches to obey what he writes. Like the prophets, also, the apostles ground their authority in their having been with Jesus and their having been appointed by him to speak for him. Paul was set apart by God for the Gospel—which God promised in the Law and the Prophets (Rom 1:1-2). His apostleship was enacted by God, not by democratic vote (Gal 1:1; cf. Eph 1:1; Col 1:1).

Because he was appointed by God and stewarded the Gospel of God, he was a unique position of authority over the churches. He tells Philemon that he has boldness to command (ἐπιτάσσειν) him to do what he (Paul) believes is best (Phlm 8). This is not a mere subjective analysis of what he believes is right. For he received his ministry and apostleship from Jesus, himself. This is very God objectively telling him what is the right thing to do because God has manifested it to them (Phlm 10-20; 1 Thess 4:1-2; 1 Cor

7:10). Obedience to the apostles' teaching has eternal significance. Those who heed and embrace their message will enjoy eternal blessedness, while those who reject it will be condemned forever (Rom 2:16; 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:4, 6, 12, 14-15). The assumption of the message they are carrying is that it contains the overarching intention of God for all human beings—there is no other message that will save men (Phil 2:12). Indeed, Paul's message in Romans 6 has two edges: (1) Paul's commands flow from his explication of Christ's work; (2) the interpretation of the facts of history is *the* interpretation from God. The Romans had been slaves to sin, but through the preaching of Paul's gospel, they now belong to God (Rom 6:17). Paul has no category for the church disobeying because he was not there in person. Merely because he was writing did not minimize the necessity to obey (Phlm 19; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:14).

Having understood themselves to be explicating and divinely interpreting the events of Jesus' earthly ministry, the writing apostles believed that their writings were to be distributed and heeded by the churches. If they did not have a divine ground, this would be very presumptuous indeed. But, Peter places Paul's writings on the same authoritative level as Moses. Speaking of Paul's sometimes difficult to understand letters, Peter warns the Dispersion of folk who like to twist his meaning to their own idiosyncrasies. They do this to Paul's letters as well as the rest of the Scriptures (καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς; 2 Pet 3:16). This is a similar canonical consciousness present when Paul places Luke's Gospel on the same divinely inspired Moses—quoting Luke 10:7 (cf.

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<sup>88</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295.

Matt 10:10) and Deuteronomy 25:4—identifying them both as Scripture (ἡ γραφή; 1 Tim 5:18).

### **Divine Foundation of the Apostolic Appointment**

The impetus set forth by the Christ that there be twelve that he would send out (apostles) stems from his institution of the New Israel—bearing witness to the Gospel of faith as children of Abraham through faith in Messiah. This impulse is further evidenced by the apostles being adamant that there be twelve of them (Acts 1:21-22). Their concert purpose became like that of the OT prophets, to call people to obedience to the terms of the New Covenant—placing faith in Messiah. These men commanded by virtue of their having been with Jesus and receiving power from the sending-out Spirit to proclaim. As Gregg Allison writes,

The conviction [of the authority of Scripture] was an inheritance from the church's Jewish roots, whose Scripture was characterized by the prophetic formula “Thus says the Lord.” . . . Moreover, in anticipation of the new Testament, Jesus authorized his disciples to be his bona fide witnesses through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit whom they would receive (John 14:26; 16:13). As the apostles composed their writings, they were conscious of speaking “by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:1-2; cf. 1 Cor. 14:36-38).<sup>89</sup>

Their having been in the presence of Christ—and imbued with authority by the perpetual Spirit of God resting on them—verifies their authority over the people. “The Spirit’s arrival will not only guarantee Jesus’ ongoing communion with the disciples; the Spirit’s arrival will also empower them to continue Jesus’ mission in the world.”<sup>90</sup> Luke writes that “When they saw the boldness (παρρησίαν) of Peter and John and they understood

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<sup>89</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 80.

that they were illiterate (ἀγράμματοί) and uneducated (ἰδιῶται) men they were astonished. And they knew that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). This kind of boldness was evident in Jesus’ speech. He said, “I have spoken boldly (παρρησία) to the world, I always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, where all the Jews were gathered, and I did not speak in secret” (John 18:20). This same spirit of boldness was promised by those who had been with him. It was the same spirit that emboldened Peter to step on the water. It was the same spirit that emboldened Peter to speak at Pentecost (cf. Acts 4:29, 31). Only those who had been commissioned by Jesus himself were acknowledged by the church.<sup>91</sup> It was paramount that they had been with Jesus since the beginning of his ministry in order to fulfill the initial number of the Twelve initiated by Jesus. When replacing Judas Iscariot, Peter made these stipulations: “Therefore it is necessary that a man who was with us the whole time which the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day which he went up from us. One of these men must be a witness of his resurrection with us” (Acts 1:21-22). The disciples’ testimony is integrally tied to their reception of the Spirit. Köstenberger and Swain write,

As the Spirit of truth, [the Spirit] will “guide” ([John] 16:13) the disciples *in* (or *into*) the way of truth revealed in Jesus (14:6). He will enable them both to remember Jesus’ enigmatic revelation (14:26; cf. 2:22) and to understand “plainly” (16:25) the full import and meaning of that revelation (14:26; 16:12-15). The Spirit is especially equipped to play this interpretive role vis-a-vis the disciples because he too is a “hearer” of the Father’s revelation through the Son (16:13), albeit an especially privileged one, who enjoys full access to divine truth.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 144.

<sup>91</sup>So also Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 291.

<sup>92</sup>Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 144-45.

Like the prophets, the call of God grounded apostolic authority.<sup>93</sup> This calling was intimately assumed in their having been in the presence of God. As von Rad has claimed, “The call commissioned the prophet: the act of writing down an account of it was aimed at those sections of the public in whose eyes he had to justify himself.”<sup>94</sup> This becomes clear in Peter’s reminders that they had heard the voice of God on the Mount of Transfiguration (reminiscent of Moses on Mount Tabor; 2 Pet 1:18). John grounds his authority in having seen Jesus with his own eyes and touched with his hands and heard with his ears (1 John 1:1-3).<sup>95</sup> Paul uses this same rationale to ground his authority as an apostle. In each of his letters he belabors his apostolicity. Acts verifies his authority by highlighting his Damascus Road experience—having seen and heard the Christ. This particularly apparent in Galatians, where Paul writes with vehemence against those who would compromise the message of the cross. “For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). “God was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone” (Gal 1:16). It is key to understand that Paul is at pains that he did not wedge his way into the apostolic band by rubbing elbows with the other apostles. He received his call from God directly—not mediated by man. Further, the authority Paul (and the apostles at large) has stems from the person and ministry of Jesus (1:18), not from some communitarian affirmation of him. As Frank Matera provocatively

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<sup>93</sup>See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 291.

<sup>94</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 55.

<sup>95</sup>John uses a verb for seeing three times in three verses.

states: “The writings of the New Testament, then, did not become inspired because they were accepted into the canon. They were accepted into the canon because the church recognized and identified them as God's self-revelatory word.”<sup>96</sup>

### **Communicating the Divine Act and Its Interpretation**

In both testaments to God’s activity in history it becomes evident that the person and the message are integrally related. The assumption that the biblical account is rooted in history is key to understanding the thrust of this chapter.<sup>97</sup> To disobey someone’s words is to rebel against the person. Whereas this may be self-evident, it is of pivotal importance to understand the relationship between a person and their words.

Theological methodology must not begin with indubitable, scientific *principia*—with no reference to Scripture—in order to gain a hearing from the unbeliever and ground belief for the believer. Bradley Nassif shows the connection between the written text and the author as holding primacy in understanding authority inherent in the text:

The question, “What is the authority of Scripture?” is resolved in the prior answer to “Who is truth?” Unlike certain forms of philosophical apologetics, we do not begin with proofs for the existence of God. *Theological inquiry does not start with abstract questions over the possibility of belief in God, arguments for his existence,*

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<sup>96</sup>Frank J. Matera, “Biblical Authority and the Scandal of the Incarnation,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 101. See also R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 110; R. R. Williams, “Scripture and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Scripture and Tradition* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 121.

<sup>97</sup>So Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Revelation in Early Christianity,” in *Christian Authority: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988). “This slow emergence of the idea of divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ provides the advantage for modern theology, that in claiming divine self-revelation it need not start with a *petitio principii*, because the mediation of that concept which summarizes the content of the Christian faith, or of Christianity as a positive religion, is to be found in history itself.” *Ibid.*, 85. Compare Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Limited Inspiration* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 5.

*and the grounds for belief, which are all outside of divine revelation, and then, only after those questions have been answered, proceed to the Christian doctrine of the Bible and its authority.* On the contrary, Orthodoxy begins where the New Testament and the Church's liturgy would have us begin, namely, with the reality of the Father-Son relationship given to us in Christ and into which we are drawn by the Spirit. . . . *Doctrinal authority, like salvation itself, begins not with a verification of possible belief in God as a hypothesis but with trust in a Person.* This approach differs from eighteenth-century European Rationalists and their modern children, but it accords well with the common experience of countless Christians down through the centuries, both East and West. Simply put, faith is based on revealed knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

The text of Scripture points not to itself as an end in itself, but to a Person.<sup>99</sup> At the outset, it would be disingenuous to fail to say that Scripture grounds its own authority—as though ink and parchment, chisel and stone could speak on its own. Rather, the text of Scripture's author is its authority. The danger in saying this, however, is to unnecessarily bifurcate the two. There is the assumption that the written text is devoid of the Spirit. This is due to an unhealthy understanding of text and speech. F. F. Bruce warns us:

Paul claimed no more authority for his letters than for his oral teaching: when he taught as Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, the medium made no difference to the authority behind his words. . . . The authority which today's reader of the Gospels discerns in Jesus' words there recorded can be no greater than the authority of which his hearers were immediately aware when he preached in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:27).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Bradley Nassif, "'Authority' in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," in *By What Authority? The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2010), 37-38; emphasis added.

<sup>99</sup>"The authority of the Bible is not found in the words themselves but in the reality to which they point and witness—the Word of God. In and through the human words of Scripture, we encounter the authoritative Word of God. It is *this* Word to which the Bible testifies. It is *this* Word that endows the Bible with authority." Matera, "Biblical Authority," 105.

<sup>100</sup>Frederick F. Bruce, "Scripture in Relation to Tradition and Reason," in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine; Essays in Honor of Richard P. C. Hanson*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 42.

This was the problem with Barth's conception of text and act. Michael Horton summarizes: "God is speaking in the *events* of Christ's doings and sayings, but the biblical writers are *reflecting* on these events."<sup>101</sup>

Horton marries the subjective and objective stances of Scripture in order to explain how Scripture is a word from God (transcending culture; objective) given through the grammar and viewpoints of his appointed representatives (enmeshed in culture; subjective). He writes,

What is God *doing* by means of a given passage? This blurs the sharp line between word and act. This is the question that such a method [of authorial discourse interpretation] poses at every turn. Subjectivity and objectivity are not *realms*. They are not universals or particulars; substances, accidents, or essence. Rather, they are *stances*. "Here I am" is an example of a subjective stance, not of subjectivity-in-general. There is therefore no reason to forbid propositions "about God" as part of revelation (*pace* liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and post-liberalism), nor any reason to reduce all of revelation to true propositions (some forms of conservatism).<sup>102</sup>

The Bible does not give mere propositions (though it does give them) as though they dropped from the heavens. It is not etched on golden tablets. It has been imparted through human lives and words in history.<sup>103</sup> Both God's sovereignty over creation and his intimate inhabiting of creation enable man to know him. Yet it is not as though human agency and finitude assume error. Man is inherently fallen, but this does not necessitate that he can never say anything objectively true. Like a courier who

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<sup>101</sup>Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 137.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 139; italics in the original.

<sup>103</sup>So Richard Gaffin, "The New Testament: How Do We Know for Sure?" *Christianity Today* vol. 32, 2 (5 Feb 1988): 28-32; although Gaffin is not as congenial toward affirming criteria for canonicity—as he fears it would set a criteria over Scripture itself. This author believes that the nature of Scripture itself (i.e., historical) demands that the criteria of apostolicity be among a criteria by which the believer can hear the voice of God in the Scriptures. This does not make historicity a foreign criteria

imparts the king's wishes to his subjects, so also the biblical authors know pieces which God has shared with them. They do not understand all the connections or ramifications for what they write, but that does not make what they say any less true. God's sovereignty, his supra-temporal nature, enables him to see all things at all times and he decides what he will share at what time with his representatives. As Jensen writes,

The different personalities, historical situations, linguistic skills and styles of the authors are plain to anyone who investigates the matter. The Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot use these and many other ways of communicating what he wishes to reveal. His providential ordering of the words of individuals who were entirely unconscious of the experience of inspiration as they uttered or wrote their inspired words.<sup>104</sup>

Yet, given man's finitude, any knowledge of God that he possesses is analogical—never equivocal or univocal.<sup>105</sup> God cannot share exhaustive knowledge with men. Finitude cannot contain the infinite. Thus, God graciously condescends and shares in part so that men might know him and his will. "Like the causal joint in the matter of double agency, we cannot possess the archetypal knowledge of God's being that could indicate just how, on the divine side, such analogies hold up. But, as with the former

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standing over the text of Scripture; rather, it affirms the historical testimony of the apostles—as evidenced in chap. six.

<sup>104</sup>Jensen, *The Revelation of God*, 157. For the unconscious nature of subject to inspiration Jensen cites John 11:51-52 where Caiaphas did not know that he spoke the word of God: τοῦτο δὲ ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐκ εἶπεν.

<sup>105</sup>Van Til explains, "By this is meant that God is the original and that man is the derivative. God has absolute self-contained system within himself. . . . But man, as God's creature, cannot have a replica of that system of God. He cannot have a reproduction of that system. He must, to be sure, think God's thoughts after him; but this mean that he must, in seeking to form his own system, constantly be subject to the authority of God's system to the extent that this is revealed to him. . . . If one does not make human knowledge wholly dependent upon the original self-knowledge and consequent revelation of God to man, then man will have to seek knowledge within himself as the final reference point." Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1961), 16-17; cf. 38.

question, it is enough that God, who does possess this exhaustive self-knowledge, has selected and authorized certain analogies and not others as appropriate.”<sup>106</sup>

There is a tendency to claim that the prophet and apostle are meaningless, but it is God who has authority to command.<sup>107</sup> Scripture appears to make no such distinction between those who bear God’s message as his appointed people and himself. When Israel rebelled against Moses, they were, in fact, rebelling against God (Exod 16:1-12; Num 14; cf. Exod 10:16; 23:20-21; Num 21:7; Deut 31:26). The words of a man make him present and justify charges of guilt for those who refuse to obey. Take, for example, a town crier who reads a dictum by the king publicly proclaiming that there will be a census taken in which they must participate. Those who do not participate are accused of treason by virtue of affronting the authority of his king. Further, such inciting by the king (though enacted by his officials) is deemed as performed by the king (2 Sam 24). In the same way, “the word is God, and God is the word. Where God is, the word is, and vice versa. God's word is not only powerful and authoritative; it is the very presence of God in our midst.”<sup>108</sup> Literature is the extension of the person. As Clifford states, “Literature is spoken thought. Speech is the soul made vocal.”<sup>109</sup> Additionally, “No wedge can be

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 145; cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 146-50; 194-99.

<sup>107</sup>Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 74, 77; Stanley J. Grenz, “An Agenda for Evangelical Theology in the Postmodern Context,” *Didaskalia* 9, 2 (1998): 10.

<sup>108</sup>John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 49. I refer the reader to my chap. 4 where I argue for an identification of words with the hypostasis of the messenger. See also David Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy: Speech Acts and an Evangelical View of Scripture,” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 118.

<sup>109</sup>John Clifford, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London: James Clarke, 1899), 177.

driven between the Spirit and the Bible, the Bible and Christ, and Christ and the Spirit. They form an inseparable mosaic of divine authority.”<sup>110</sup>

Post-conservative co-opting of speech-act theory so affirms speech’s doing that the action supersedes the objectivity of the word.<sup>111</sup> That is, while there is illocutionary force in speech, the fact remains that there are locutions that contour those purposes and actions of the text. The danger is that the Word of God becomes a happening *only*, to the detriment of the actual words.<sup>112</sup> The text of Scripture not only narrates the historic occurrence of God Incarnate, but it presents itself as the only testimony to this event. It provides the objective interpretation of the facts by the inspiration of the Spirit—who has a true understanding of the world and its events.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority*, 46.

<sup>111</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 73-74, 83, 86-87; Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe?” in *Essentials of Christian Theology* ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 23.

<sup>112</sup>Compare “For me the Word of God is a *happening*, not a thing. Therefore the Bible must *become* the Word of God, and it does so through the work of the Spirit.” Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John Godsey (Richmond: John Knox, n.d.), 26.

<sup>113</sup>One’s doctrine of Scripture assumes a particular understanding of theology proper. My assumption is that the Omniscient Being can truly communicate through the means of human language that which is objectively true—as he knows and interprets it for people. Merely because God uses imperfect, perspectively-bound instruments does not negate the eighth-note is being played as an eighth-note and not as a sixteenth-note. Thomas Crisp is helpful here: “As I read the evidence, then, there’s reason to withhold the proposition that the sum of the probabilities along the pathways of the above lattice favorable to T [‘God exists’] and A-E [A: God intervenes in history to provide a propositional revelation about himself; B: Jesus’ teachings were such that they could be plausibly interpreted as implying that he intended to found a church that would function for a long period of time as an authoritative source of information about him; C: Jesus rose from the dead; D: In raising Jesus from the dead, God declared his approval of Jesus’ teachings; E: The church that, by the start of the fifth century, had pronounced on which books were divinely inspired, is a legitimate successor—the ‘closest continuer’—of the church founded by Jesus] is high, if I’m right to think the strongest case for IB [the Bible is divinely inspired] from history and natural theology is variated by an undermining objection.” Thomas M. Crisp, “On Believing That the Scriptures are Divinely Inspired,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 201. Points A and B are where the distinctions between a neo-orthodox understanding of Scripture and an historic understanding lay.

The author of Hebrews writes: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world” (Heb 1:1-3). The author continues to elaborate the surpassing authority that the Son, the fullest *imago dei*<sup>114</sup> and χαρακτήρ of God, by showing his supremacy to angels and Moses. The veracity of the OT comes in two parts—epistemologically and existentially. First, God has revealed himself to and through the prophetic office and angelic train (Heb 1:5-2:8). Second, this message declared by them has proven certain (ἐγένετο βέβαιος; Heb 2:2) throughout history. Because God has done this in history—recording and interpreting events—the recipients of Hebrews must hold even faster to the doctrine with which they have been entrusted. As Bavinck wrote, “But *think* Christ away for a moment, with all he has spoken and done and wrought. Immediately history falls to pieces. It has lost its heart, its kernel, its centre, its distribution. . . . But revelation teaches that God is the Lord of the ages and that Christ is the turning point of these ages. And thus it brings into history unity and plan, progress and aim.”<sup>115</sup>

After a flurry of argument in chapter 1, the author of Hebrews concludes: “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb 2:3-4). The revelation through the person of Jesus Christ is even greater.

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<sup>114</sup>The radiance of God’s glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης ; 1:3).

<sup>115</sup>Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 141; italics in the original. See also John M. Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 99-100.

The faithful must be convinced of its faithfulness because (1) Jesus himself was the one who declared the message first (ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα λαλεῖσθαι) and (2) those who were with him, who were imbued with Jesus' own authority (the apostles), attested to its truth (ἐβεβαιώθη). It is not as though the apostles merely wrote down the words of the Lord, but they also went throughout the known world proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. They imparted the salvation inaugurated by Jesus to people.<sup>116</sup> They were well-known by believers throughout the Roman Empire due to their boldness and resoluteness in imparting the message and the Spirit of God through baptism.

Instead of locating authority in various criteria, it appears that the church placed their emphasis upon the *who* of Scriptures—Jesus as the object and the apostles as his witnesses. The only way for the church to know Jesus, however, was found in the pages of Scripture—the entire canon. Otherwise, it is left with a canon within a canon.<sup>117</sup> Many appeal to Luther's dictum "*was christum treibet*" and conclude with "an ever-increasing influence of the church's and the individual's judgment as to what material is still to be accepted as canon."<sup>118</sup> Others in church history have sought to find authority for the Bible in the historical events themselves (i.e., Barth).<sup>119</sup> Those that witnessed these events were merely relaying the miraculous stories for future generations. It is not

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<sup>116</sup>Note that the author of Hebrews makes the connection between the apostles' hearing (τῶν ἀκουσάντων) and their testimony to individuals (ἡμᾶς).

<sup>117</sup>One can readily see the dangers from men in history like the Gnostics (enlightenment), Marcion (abrogation of the OT), Martin Luther (justification by faith), and even John Calvin (compatibility with the other NT writings). These men sought criteria based upon a theme, not upon the witnesses, upon criteria not shown from Scripture itself.

<sup>118</sup>Herman Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. H. De Jongste (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 5.

<sup>119</sup>Karl Barth, *CD* 1.1, 143-62, 190-98.

as though great effort needed to be spent on exegesis, but the fact of God incarnate is the subject of concerted meditation. Unless there are criteria within Scripture itself, the exegete and believer is left to extraneous principles by which he may judge whether a teaching or book of the Bible is relevant today. Just as Calvin was wary of church councils presuming to determine what books were canonical, so also Ridderbos shows that any attempt to *determine*, as opposed to recognize, the canon denigrates the canon—since it must then rest on human judgments. He summarizes:

In the last analysis the final decision as to what the church deems to be holy and impeachable does not rest in the biblical canon itself. The final court of appeal lies in a human judgment as to what is deemed to be essential and central in the canon. And such a judgment may be based upon the science of historical criticism, the experience of faith of the church, or upon an actual hearing of God's word in the preaching. No matter what standard is employed, one thing is certain, namely, that such an outlook diminishes in principle the significance of the Scriptures as canon.<sup>120</sup>

The criteria by which believers know that God is speaking must be in the words themselves; otherwise there must be a criteria by which God's revelation is adjudicated. Jesus' sheep hear his voice (John 10:27). How do they know that it is, indeed, their Shepherd? The "assurance is supernatural. When God speaks, he at the same time assures us that he is speaking."<sup>121</sup> Frame continues why external criteria (particularly that of the Roman Catholic magisterium) prove problematic: "The Roman church has claimed that the authority of the canon rests on that church's pronouncement. But (1) the church's conviction on this matter, unanimous since AD 367, precedes any statement by a Roman Catholic pope or council; and (2) . . . God intends to rule his

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 8-9. See also Klyne Snodgrass, "Providence Is Not Enough," *Christianity Today*, 32:2 (Feb. 5, 1988): 33-34.

<sup>121</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 136.

church by a book, not a church authority. So the authority of the church rests on the authority of the canon, not the other way around.”<sup>122</sup>

While Bavinck believes the canon is canon by its mere existence,<sup>123</sup> referred to as the Reformed view of the *autopistia* of Scripture, more needs to be said so that the Christian is not left with the charge of fideism. Furthermore, giving an answer for the hope within the believer requires that there be more to the equation than the answer being “I believe Scripture because I believe it is God’s word.”<sup>124</sup> Some claim vicious circularity since both the premise and conclusion are identical. This does not advance knowledge, and so is detrimental to argument. Therefore, when arguing for the faith, the theologian needs to move from the known to deduce the unknown. He must move from the objective facts of history toward the assertion that Scripture is God’s Word. In reply to this charge of circularity, the theologian must affirm and show that any appeal to an ultimate truth and reality must be circular. Van Til writes, “To admit one’s own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is therefore to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*. The starting point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.”<sup>125</sup> William Edgar concludes, “How could it be

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>123</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt and John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 371.

<sup>124</sup>See Ridderbos, *Authority of the New Testament*, 11.

<sup>125</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P& R, 2003), 130. In the footnote, William Edgar explains: “Against the criticism of circular reasoning, Van Til states that such reasoning is appropriate, at least in the sense that one cannot step outside of the circle without losing the truth of the Christian worldview. He is not advocating simple tautologies, such as, ‘the Bible is true because it says it is.’ His methodology is ‘transcendental,’ getting to the other side (not in reality but for argument’s sake) and pointing out the incapacity of unbelief to establish meaning and value” *ibid.*, 130, fn. 7. See also John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 9-14.

otherwise, if God be God?”<sup>126</sup> An analysis of Scripture’s own testimony to the events of history and the writings that follow will place us on solid ground to answer the skeptic. This chapter on the NT witness to its divine origin will follow the trajectory of the previous chapter in showing the relationship between God, the Son, to his divinely appointed representatives to speak his words.

### **Apostolic Office**

Before Jesus ascended, he promised his followers that he would send the Comforter to guide them into all truth. “I still have many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them now. When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will lead you all in all truth. For he will not speak from himself, but whatever he hears he will speak and coming he will announce it to you. Everything, which the Father has, is mine. Therefore, I said this because he will take what is mine and will give it to you” (John 16:12-15; cf. John 14:25-26). Just as the prophets of the OT were empowered by the Spirit of God for witness, so also the apostles received the Holy Spirit to carry them along and remind them all that which Christ did and taught—even elucidating his teaching (2 Pet 3:16; 1 Tim 5:17-19). As Calvin wrote,

Now it is said to us before the Apostles had published the Gospel to all the world God made His Holy Spirit descend upon them, so that we might know that they have put forward nothing of their own, but that they have faithfully delivered that which was commanded to them by God. For if we were not assured that the Apostles were as new creatures and that God had given them a certain mark to show that they were approved and authorized by Him, what would become of our faith? It would be only a fleeting opinion. We could say, “I think so; so it seems to me,” but that we should be entirely persuaded to have a proper firmness and constancy—it would be impossible. . . . Our faith will be always firm and will not give way when we hold

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<sup>126</sup>William Edgar, introduction to *Christian Apologetics*, by Cornelius Van Til, 6.

this basic principle: that God is He Who leads us onward, Who calls us to Himself, and that the teaching which is preached to us is His pure and infallible truth.<sup>127</sup>

The soteriological economy has been set up by God, the Father, so that his Son's representatives will be sent out to Judea, Samaria, and the utter parts of the earth, empowered by the Spirit, so that the Gospel will not be contained in one geographic locale. "The way they were made competent for their task is clear from their endowment and preparation by the Holy Spirit."<sup>128</sup> Just as Moses and the prophets spent time in God's presence and went out to the covenant people, so also the apostles are sent out to the lost sheep in order to bring them (Matt 10:6; Acts 18:10; Rom 15:16; cf. Isa 66:10-23).<sup>129</sup> Just like a trees branches spread out to give fruit, so also the apostles are to be ever connected to Christ, the vine, and extended out to minister the Gospel to others (John 15:1-11). Ridderbos summarizes well,

Without trying to treat all the facets of the apostolate, it can be stated that the role of the Apostles within the history of redemption was unique and not repeatable. Their most primary and important task was to be the very foundation of the Church, not only because they were the receivers of revelation but also because they were the bearers, the instruments of the revelation, to which Christ bound his church throughout all subsequent ages, the revelation, upon which he established and built the church.<sup>130</sup>

They were the ones sent out by Jesus, just as the prophets were sent out by YHWH. He continues,

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<sup>127</sup>John Calvin, *The Deity of Christ and Other Sermons*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 244.

<sup>128</sup>Ridderbos, *Authority of the New Testament*, 15.

<sup>129</sup>So Pannenberg writes, "If the revelation of the Son is mediated through the Spirit and if the working of the Spirit produced scriptures as its deposit, then the writings of the apostles who received the full share of the Spirit can hardly be considered less inspired than the prophetic writings of the Old Testament." Pannenberg, "Revelation," 83.

<sup>130</sup>Ridderbos, *Authority of the New Testament*, 14-15.

The formal structure of the apostolate is derived from the Jewish legal system in which a person may be given the legal power to represent another. The one who has such power of attorney is called a *Sjaliach* (apostle). The uniqueness of this relationship is pregnantly expressed by the notion that the *Sjaliach* (apostle) of a man, is as the man himself. In this sense anyone who receives an apostle receives the person who has sent him.<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, salvation-historically speaking, the Apostolic train ended with the death of John. The Spirit was given in a peculiar way of authenticating the apostolic message and guiding them into truth as they wrote and concluded the covenantal document.<sup>132</sup>

Ridderbos extends apostolic authority and tradition outside of the apostles. It appears, however, that biblically-understood apostolic authority originates in the person commissioned by the Christ. He says,

Apostolic authority and apostolic tradition in the New Testament must not be bound to the person of the apostle. Such authority and tradition acquires increasingly its own “unpersonal” existence. What is apostolic is not limited to the *viva vox* of the apostles, nor to their own writings. It is more than that. . . . This does not depend upon its having been written by the hand of an apostle. It is rather whether its content is a part of this basic apostolic tradition.<sup>133</sup>

This complicates the issue of canon. That is, if inscripturation is not bound with a person, then the canon cannot be closed since there are numerous writings—from the first century to present day—that would accord with the apostolic deposit. The onus of the matter of canonicity lies within the issue of inscripturation of the Lord’s ministry and words. Particularly, hearkening back to the discussion of the *Sjaliach*, Jesus called particular men to be with him so he could subsequently send them out. Surely, there is a deposit that Paul refers to that is passed down, but it requires too much of this deposit for

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid.,15.

<sup>132</sup>See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 295.

<sup>133</sup>Ridderbos, *Authority of the New Testament*, 35.

it to be the criterion for canonicity. Rather, the ministry of the apostles is fitness enough for words to be recorded for progeny. Had Andrew or Philip actually written an epistle or gospel, it would be sufficient to be admitted to the canon because of their having been with Jesus and endowed with the Holy Spirit to recall what Jesus had said and done. Yet, in the providence of God, there are no extant books authored by these apostles. Thus, the canon is closed.

Ridderbos writes,

Witnesses are those who were present when Christ spoke his words and performed his works, especially after his resurrection, so that they can now give a first hand report of these facts on the basis of their own experience (Acts 1:22; 10:29; 2:32; 3:15, etc). And the concept of a witness thus has a receptive as well as a productive sense. In this sense Paul was expressly included by Luke among the witnesses of Christ. Paul was the last of those who personally, heard and saw the risen Savior, so that he could therefore be included among the witnesses (Acts 22:14ff; 26:16).<sup>134</sup>

In this way, it is curious why Ridderbos would believe that apostolic authority extends beyond the apostles.

Just as YHWH called Abraham out of his people and set him apart to receive and distribute blessings, so he called out Moses. Just as he endowed Moses with authority to be his *Sjaliach* to testify to his miraculous works on behalf of his people, so he endowed the prophetic office to call Israel back to the terms and conditions of the covenant. Just as the prophets were called by YHWH and received visions and called the people to repentance, so also did Jesus commune with God and spoke with authority not his own. Just as YHWH chose particular individuals to be with him so that he might send them out to preach, so also did Jesus choose men to be with him so that they might be his apostles. P. T. O'Brien makes this connection as well, writing:

God had set Paul apart for his service before he was born. Echoing OT prophetic call language, he speaks of this divine separation in terms that suggest he was conscious, like Jeremiah, that he had stood in the council of the Lord and that his message was God's sure word to the Gentiles. At the same time Paul's allusions to Isaiah (49:1, 5, 6) suggest that he was chosen by God to continue the work of the Servant of the Lord. Both had been chosen from birth, both were wholly dependent on Yahweh's calling, and both had a positive ministry to Gentiles in view.<sup>135</sup>

As was seen in the person and ministry of Moses (and the subsequent prophets), the primary criteria for speaking on behalf of YHWH was that these men had been called by YHWH and had spent time in his presence. This is the same case in the NT witness. The authority and authenticity of the apostles' words were derived from their having been with Jesus. John made this claim: "we have seen his glory" (ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ; John 1:14); "That which was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we beheld and touched with our own hands, concerning the word of life" ("Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐωράκαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς; 1 John 1:1; cf. 1 John 1:2, 3; 4:14). The apostles make it clear that they have witnessed firsthand the miraculous works and message of Jesus. At the conclusion to Peter's speech in Acts 4, the synagogue leaders command them to be silent and not speak in the name of Jesus anymore. "But Peter and John said in reply to them, 'In the presence of God, whether it is right to listen to you instead of to God, decide. For we cannot help but speak that which we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-20). It is important to note the link the apostles make between being firsthand witnesses and being sent by God. In verse 20 they make it clear that they have beheld and heard Jesus'

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 62.

ministry. This is the justification for why they preach in the name of Jesus. To have been with Jesus requires that they obey God by preaching in the name of Jesus.<sup>136</sup> So

Wolterstorff comments,

The thought is clear in our sources that an apostle is not left to his own devices for interpreting this exceedingly strange human being. Jesus interpreted himself. Their witnessing to Jesus was to take the form of communicating that self-interpretation—in the context, of course, of their memory of the sayings and deeds of Jesus. Not everything that they said about Jesus, in the course of witnessing to him, consisted of repeating what he told them; much of it came from their memories of the goings-on surrounding him.<sup>137</sup>

Regarding this aspect of authority, it is important to see the difference between how Peter speaks of his apostolicity and how Paul does. In his two epistles, Peter merely states that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ (ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1 adds δοῦλος). It is clear that Peter was with Jesus throughout his ministry. This fact is well-attested. He has seen Jesus and he had been sent out by Jesus himself.<sup>138</sup>

Paul, on the other hand, goes to great lengths to defend his apostolicity by appealing to God's will and his conversion experience on his way to Damascus. "A

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<sup>135</sup>P. T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 20.

<sup>136</sup>See E. Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen, Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1954).

<sup>137</sup>Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 292.

<sup>138</sup>Wolterstorff summarizes Locke's procedure: "First one determines the probability of satisfactory evidence that that event, which Peter identified as a miracle, really was a miracle. If that probability proves rather high, one believes with an appropriate firmness that if it occurred, it was a miracle. Then one moves on to consider the probability on satisfactory evidence that that miracle, if it was that, really does confirm that Peter's experience was an experience of receiving a revelation from God. If the probability of that proves rather high, one believes with an appropriate firmness that if that was a miracle, then Peter did receive a revelation from God. Lastly, one considers the probability on satisfactory evidence that if God did indeed reveal something to Peter, then it was so-and-so that God revealed, not something else. If the probability of that proves rather high, then one believes, quite infirmly now, that so-and-so. One needn't, before believing the content of the purported revelation, take the additional step of

servant of Jesus Christ, called apostle, set apart unto the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1).  
“Paul, called an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (1 Cor 1:1; cf. 2 Cor 1:1).  
“Paul, the apostle—not from man nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God, the Father”  
(Gal 1:1; cf. Eph 1:1; Col 1:1). The epistle to the Galatians is very telling when it comes  
to issues of Paul’s authority through the letter. Why should the Galatians repent and obey  
Paul? Because he is an apostle. He is not a self-proclaimed apostle, but he has been called  
out by God. He says, “I did not receive [the Gospel] from any man, nor by man’s  
teaching, but [I received the Gospel] by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12).

The revelation he is referring to is what he received on the Damascus Road. God’s self-revelation was the only thing that could have so dramatically re-directed his course. Just like the prophet Jeremiah, God had called Paul to be his servant out of his mother’s womb (Gal 1:15; Jer 1:5). God had appointed him an apostle to the Gentiles, not based upon his righteous deeds, but before he had done anything good or evil, God elected him. Paul goes to great lengths to show that his apostolicity was not based upon him keeping company with the right people, but by being in the presence of One person who has made him competent.

Just as Moses and Jeremiah were set apart for the work of God, so also Paul was set apart for Jesus’ work of proclamation.<sup>139</sup> Not only did Paul have firsthand knowledge of Jesus’ life, the Holy Spirit so gifted him that miracles and signs authenticated his ministry. Like the prophet Elijah, Jesus’ words were supported by the

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assessing the probability on satisfactory evidence that the revealer is veracious and reliable; for it is a necessary truth, self-evident to us, that if God reveals something, it’s true.” Ibid., 266.

<sup>139</sup>Paul is paradigmatic for the apostles, so what is said of him in this section is also true for the other apostles.

divine because he healed and performed miracles (see John 3:2; 9:16; Acts 2:22). In the same way, the Holy Spirit so empowered Jesus' apostles that they were able to do the miraculous as well—to attest to their words of authority (Mark 16:17-20; Acts 2:43; 4:30; 8:6; 14:3). It wasn't until the other apostles had heard that Paul was converted *and* that sign and wonders were done through him that they gave him credence (Acts 15:12). Paul verifies his ministry by signs and wonders being performed throughout the known world (Rom 15:19). He further says to the Corinthians, “The signs of the apostle were performed among you in all patience, signs and wonders and authority” (2 Cor 12:12). Note the linking of signs and wonders and Paul's true apostolicity.

While signs and wonders were criteria to attest to the veracity of an apostle's authority, the defining characteristic was that he had been in the presence of Jesus. For even false prophets (like Jannes and Jambres) will be able to perform signs and wonders, as Jesus said (Matt 24:24). Yet, because they had not been with Jesus, they were not to be heeded. Further, if their message did not cohere with Jesus' message, they were to be exposed.<sup>140</sup> Harrison notes the unequivocal authority the apostles had in the primitive church when he writes:

The Church of the second century in restricting the canon, as it believed, to the writings of the apostles, or to the books which it believed undoubtedly enshrined their teaching, recognized this distinction between the apostles and all other ministers and teachers of the Church. The Scriptures then are authoritative not simply as primary sources for the doctrine of the early Church on historical grounds, but because the apostles are unique instruments of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Note again the parallel with Moses and subsequent false prophets; see Deut 13:1-5.

<sup>141</sup>D. E. W. Harrison, “Scripture and Tradition: The Situation Today,” in *Scripture and Tradition*, ed. F. W. Dillistone (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 138. So also Faustus Socinus who has four principles which render a text as unreliable for canonical purposes: 1) “If the Writer be of little or no credit, or such, whose Fidelity and Science may be question'd”; 2) “if the true Writer be unknown”; 3) “if it be

There is no more important person in history than Jesus. He went about the earth preaching and healing all kinds of diseases as a sign that God and his kingdom had broken into history in a way wholly different than before. Constrained by Scripture's promises that Immanuel would come and set aright all that had gone awry, Jesus fulfilled and en-fleshed all that the OT had spoken of regarding YHWH. The authoritative words spoken by the Creator had arrived on the sod of humanity.

### **Πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος**

As demonstrated in chapter 3, Grenz and Franke interpret 2 Timothy 3:16 differently than the Reformed Protestants historically argued. They write, “Through the rare use of *theopneustos*, which may intend an allusion to God's breathing into the nostrils of Adam making him spring to life, Paul declared that ‘God breathes into the Scripture’ thereby making it useful. As the evangelical Greek scholar Edward Goodrick concludes, the text focuses on the surpassing value of the Spirit-energized scriptures and not on some purported “pristine character of the autographs.””<sup>142</sup> Calling this the “pneumatological theological method,”<sup>143</sup> Grenz and Franke have moved the force of Paul's words from the written text (as inspired by the Spirit; *a priori*) to the result the

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otherwise made appear, or there be any just Suspicion of the Book hath been corrupted, or in any Respect alter'd or deprav'd”; 4) “if there be Testimonies of Men worthy of Faith, and therefore not to be given to that Book,” Faustus Socinus, *An Argument for the Authority of Holy Scripture*, ed. Edward Harwood (London: W. Meadows, 1731), 4; also Warfield who writes, “How completely Augustine's mind was engrossed with the principle of apostolicity as the foundation of authority is illustrated by a tendency he exhibited to treat as in some sense authoritative everything in the Church for which an apostolic origin can be inferred.” Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, (Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, 2011), 434.

<sup>142</sup>Edward Goodrick, “Let's Put 2 Timothy 3:16 Back into the Bible,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 486-87, quoted in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

written text has when utilized by the Spirit (*a posteriori*). Is this a correct exegesis of the text? What follows is an all-too-brief treatment of Paul's second letter to Timothy.

Luke Timothy Johnson says this passage in question is one which the “interpreter would just as soon avoid” since it has been “systematically tortured by readers less interested in considering what Paul had to say to Timothy than in using these verses to support theological position taking.”<sup>144</sup> Johnson sweeps both tendencies aside in interpreting this passage—“all Scripture is God-breathed” or “every God-breathed Scripture”—labeling them as “all wrong.” He begins with the assertion that “the authority of the Bible does not rest in its inspiration, but on its canonicity.”<sup>145</sup> He concludes that “the theological conviction that the Bible is divinely inspired rests not on the Bible's self-referential statements, but on the faith in Christians that through its very human and culturally conditioned words, God's word is also spoken and God's Spirit is at work, so that the historical meaning of any passage does not exhaust its significance or the uses to which God's Holy Spirit can put it.”<sup>146</sup>

The problem with such a view persists to push the epistemological question to the background. For, Johnson says that Paul refers “to whatever collection of compositions he and the earliest churches used and regarded as authoritative.”<sup>147</sup> Yet how why did they regard these texts as authoritative? Johnson equivocates the term

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<sup>143</sup>John R. Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 112.

<sup>144</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 422.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 422-23.

θεόπνευστος when he says that Paul’s community believed “various kinds of prayers and prophecy were regarded as inspired by God and containing revelation from God.”<sup>148</sup> It is true, “Paul’s main emphasis here . . . is on Scripture’s ‘usefulness.’”<sup>149</sup> Yet, the emphasis is grounded in the reality of Scripture being given by God.<sup>150</sup> This is the *a priori* of his exhortation. If Scripture is not divinely breathed out then there is no confidence in its usefulness. “A reminder of its divine origin is perfectly appropriate in a passage intended to impress on his disciple its value both as authenticating the Christian message and as a pastoral instrument.”<sup>151</sup>

It is agreed with Johnson, that too many exegetes have been anxious to attribute Paul’s statement to anachronistically attribute it to the canon as it currently exists. The two options for θεόπνευστος and ὠφέλομις is that of an attributive or predicate adjective. Since syntax alone is not conclusive (there are examples throughout the NT of both uses of the πᾶς + noun + adjective), context determines its function. As Towner has written, “The attributive meaning is unlikely in view of the presence of the conjunction ‘and’ (*kai*) between the two adjectives, ‘inspired *kai* useful.’”<sup>152</sup> Further, if the phrase is translated in the attributive you are left with “Every God-breathed Scripture is also profitable.” This proves to be a dangling clause so that it is “completely

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 423.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 424.

<sup>150</sup>So Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 589; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 795.

<sup>151</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 203.

<sup>152</sup>Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 588.

unnecessary comment, unless the implication is that some Scripture is not inspired.”<sup>153</sup> It is anticlimactic and “it is difficult to see why the apostle should need to assure Timothy that inspired scriptures are profitable.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, the best way to think of this phrase is that both adjectives are predicates and to be applied to the entire OT.<sup>155</sup>

With regards to the singular use of γραφή some have claimed that this commands the particularity of πᾶσα so that it is “every Scripture.” This is not necessitated, as though it cannot refer to the body of Scripture—namely, the Law and the Prophets.<sup>156</sup> For 2 Peter 1:20 uses the singular to denote the entirety of the writing prophets.<sup>157</sup> In the syntactical structure, Knight uses a parallel usage from 1 Timothy 4:4 where the phrase πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλὸν is followed by καὶ and the following adjective (ἀπόβλητον) is a predicate.<sup>158</sup> “The natural understanding of two adjectives connected by καὶ is that they are used in the same way, whether attributively or predicately. This favors placing the verb ‘is’ before θεόπνευστος so that the two adjective remain together as predicate adjectives.”<sup>159</sup> Kelly concludes, “Furthermore, taking θεόπνευστος as attributive would imply that Paul did not regard all γραφή as

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid. So also Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 792-93.

<sup>154</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1986), 164.

<sup>155</sup>Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 793; Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 279; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 446-49.

<sup>156</sup>So Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 445.

<sup>157</sup>So Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202-03.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 446-47.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 447.

God-breathed—a position that would be incredible, since by γραφή he always means scripture.”<sup>160</sup>

With regards to the word θεόπνευστος, Towner helpfully connects its with a similar Pauline-coined<sup>161</sup> word—θεοπδίδακτοί in 1 Thessalonians 4:9. This is not divine dictation, but affirms the concurrency of divine and human agency—the divine and human teacher are both needed to impart the διδασκαλία to the pupil. As Towner concludes, “God’s activity of ‘breathing’ and the human activity of writing are in some sense complementary (cf. 2 Pet 1:21).”<sup>162</sup> Because all Scripture is breathed out by God, the second adjective necessarily flows from its ontological veracity.<sup>163</sup> And this how the church has historically taken the meaning of the word.<sup>164</sup>

The word is a *hapax* but Warfield has done extensive study on this. “Warfield’s study has proved to be so convincing that BAGD list only his work in its bibliographic note on θεόπνευστος.”<sup>165</sup> After surveying several contemporary Greek texts for the word, Warfield summarizes: “We cannot think it speaking too strongly, therefore, to say that there is discoverable in none of these passages the slightest trace of an active sense of θεόπνευστος, by which it should express the idea, for example, of ‘breathing the divine spirit,’ or even such a quasi-active idea as that of ‘redolent of

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid.; so William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 566-68.

<sup>161</sup>Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 794.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 589. Towner further connects the relationship between God-breathed Scripture and Spirit carrying the prophet found in Hos 9:7 (πνευματοφόρος ; LXX) and Num 24:2.

<sup>163</sup>Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 590; also Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

<sup>164</sup>See Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 203.

<sup>165</sup>Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 446.

God.”<sup>166</sup> After evaluating verbal compounds of θεός, Warfield concludes: “The notion normally expressed [with these compounds] is that of a result produced by God.”<sup>167</sup> The exceptions to this conclusion “cannot avail to set aside the normal sense of this compound” and that of Scripture being “produced by God’s creative breath.”<sup>168</sup>

Given this brief exegetical survey of the term, it would be disingenuous to affirm, with Goodrick and post-conservatives, that there could be human writings that are animated by the Spirit, thus making them useful. This is wholly alien to Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in syntax, grammar, and logic. If one follows the minority view, he is left with having to adjudicate which passages are God-breathed. He is also left with the untenable position that a passage of Scripture could be inspired one moment (when the Spirit vivifies the passage in time and space) and uninspired in the next—which is conceivable if θεόπνευστος is not taken as an exhaustive grounding for Scripture. And so, as Warfield wrote, “Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built.”<sup>169</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is the final revelation of God. God spoke through many people at many times, but in the last days he has spoken through his Son. What the OT Law had

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<sup>166</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 272.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 281.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 296.

demanded in obedience to the God of the Exodus, Jesus fulfilled. The day, to which the OT prophets had been pointing toward, Jesus was born, killed, and exalted. What the OT Writings had shown as wisdom's way, Jesus lived. His entire life was consumed with his Father's exaltation. His movements were determined by Scripture's necessity of fulfillment. Much more could have been written about him, enough to fill the entire world (John 21:15).

The apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, saw fit to record only that which was necessary for obedience to the New Covenant Lord. There is no other word needed from God because he has spoken with final authority in the perfection of his Son as wrath was consumed by the cries of the Forsaken and righteousness was given in the vindication of the Righteous One.

CHAPTER 6  
SELF-ATTESTATION, SPEECH-ACT THEORY,  
AND THE ECONOMIC TRINITY

In light of the last two chapters that have looked at the Bible's own presentation, it is helpful to draw together several theological threads and to make the argument more explicit. Throughout this chapter the issue of Scripture's self-attestation will be brought together by looking at speech-act theory as seen through the lens of the economic Trinity. In other words, this chapter will make explicit that which shaped the previous chapters. It will look at God's aseity and God's communicative activity with his world. This communication is imparted by God's representatives and crystallized into an authoritative text. This authoritative text is both objectively true and subjectively sealed upon the hearts and consciences of believers so that confidence might be had in its divine origin.<sup>1</sup> This authority is witnessed to in the text itself and Scripture's self-witness must be maintained if there is to be a proper ground for Christian theology. Authors like Timothy Ward, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Michael Horton have been extremely helpful in these areas, and will be depended upon for the lion share of what follows.

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<sup>1</sup>Horton writes, "We could say that here [the relationship between cosmological science and phenomenological theological discourse as seen in Psalm 93] the noematic content is divine faithfulness and the illocutionary stance is divine assurance rather than scientific assertions." Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 161.

## God's Aseity

Scripture presents the Christian God as superior to all other deities. All other deities are mute and dumb and cannot act on behalf of their worshipers (Deut 32:21, 39; 2 Sam 7:22; Isa 45:5). He is self-contained and is dependent upon nothing and no one. He is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything. Indeed, he is the source of all men's lives (Acts 17:25; Ps 50:7-15). Even the gifts that men offer at the altar are given because God has first given them (1 Chr 29:14, 16). Man has nothing he can give to improve God's status or wisdom or power (Job 22:2). All men are dependent upon God for their existence. They have breath because he gave breath to them (Job 27:3; 33:4). He is the only independent Being. He owns everything because he made it and exercises rights over his creation (Zech 12:1; Rev 4:11; Acts 14:15).

God did not form the earth and all that is in it by physical fingers, for he is spirit (John 4:24). "May all the earth fear YHWH. . . . For he spoke and it was, he commanded and it stood" (Ps 33:8-9). It is clear that God is utterly transcendent, utterly distinct from his creation. He exercises power over it and keeps it in existence by his will (Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:10-23; 1 Cor 8:6). The earth and all that is in it are rightfully his servants. He is Lord. As Frame writes, "To be Lord one must have servants. In that sense God cannot be Lord without his having servants to rule. Nevertheless his power and right to rule as Lord are not derived from the creation. . . . His lordship derives from his own being alone."<sup>2</sup> Since he is Lord over all and dependent upon none, and given divine

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<sup>2</sup>John M. Frame, "Divine Aseity and Apologetics," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 116.

simplicity, the Triune God's aseity underlies all other Christian doctrines.<sup>3</sup> Frame concludes, "If God is *a se*, then he has the resources within himself to carry out his purposes for history. His eternal plan does not depend on creatures for its formulation or implementation."<sup>4</sup>

As such, having created the world, all that is knowable in the world is known in reference to this God. Because he is infinite and transcendent, only he knows himself completely. "He knows what is possible in the world by knowing his own powers; and he knows what is actual in the world (at all times) by knowing his own eternal plan, as well as by his perfect awareness of the temporal accomplishment of that plan. In other words, he does not depend on the creation for his knowledge even of the creation."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the biblical record shows that God also condescends in order that man might know him—and that his purposes for creation will be driven forward. "Focusing on divine authorship—God's capacity to make communicative initiatives and to bring about communicative results—yields a fresh account of divine transcendence and immanence (i.e., God's

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<sup>3</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 100; idem, *Christianity and Idealism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 85. Due to length, a discussion of God's simplicity cannot be treated sufficiently. This author affirms the doctrine of God's simplicity, which states that God does not exist in parts but all his attributes cohere in each other. As James E. Dolezal states, "Simplicity is the ontologically sufficient condition for God's absoluteness. The doctrine of divine simplicity teaches that (1) God is identical with his existence and his essence and (2) that each of his attributes is ontologically identical with his existence and with every other one of his attributes. There is nothing in God that is not God." James E. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 2. See also Jay W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003); Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards' God: Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 83-106; John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 225-40.

<sup>4</sup>Frame, "Divine Aseity," 118.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 121.

distinction from and relation to the world).”<sup>6</sup> God appears in his creation to move his story forward (i.e., to Abraham at Moriah, in the burning bush, on the mountain in fire and thunder). Yet, when he appears, he also speaks. “The key assumption is that theology must think God according to God's self-presentation, which effectively means attending to what God does, not least by means of speaking.”<sup>7</sup>

He does not speak to nothing (as he did at creation). He speaks to people. What is more, he enters into a relationship with a particular group of people. It is not as though he exercises bald power over his creation like a despot.

*What is ontologically interesting about the “I am that I am” is what it implies about God’s capacity to communicate.* What comes to the fore is language as “allocation”: locution or speech that addresses another. To acknowledge this voice as more than a human textual construction is to acknowledge that it addresses not only Moses but the contemporary reader, not from within the bush from within the text. This way of construing the “metaphysics of the Exodus” lays the emphasis not on God's abstract existence but on God's self-communicative activity.<sup>8</sup>

YHWH willingly enters into covenant with men in order to reveal himself and his purposes. “God has the ability to ‘communicate’ his own life to others, through Word and Spirit, thereby establishing communion and fulfilling his word to Israel: ‘I will be your God and you will be my people.’ God presents himself to Israel as one who is trustworthy and true, the one who keeps his word. In fulfilling his promises, for example, God shows he is the one on whose word others can rely.”<sup>9</sup> As Timothy Ward has succinctly put the matter, “It would have been quite possible for God to have introduced painful child-

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<sup>6</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 194; italics in the original.

bearing into the woman's life, and to have made the snake crawl on its belly, and made the man's labor on the land difficult, all without speaking, by wordless acts of judgment. However, the God who is presented to us in the Bible is quite unlike that: he is a God who, by his very nature, acts by speaking."<sup>10</sup> Now whether someone will allow for God to speak into creation is wholly dependent upon his affirming or denying God as self-contained and sovereign over that creation.<sup>11</sup>

### **God's Triune Communicative Action**

God is not aloof from the creation he spoke into existence. He did not create by the breath of his mouth and retreat to see how it all played out. Scripture displays a picture of an intimate relationship between what God desires for the fulfillment of his purposes for his creation and his bringing it to pass. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, he confronted them in the Garden. When Cain killed Abel, he confronted him and cast him to the east. When men's hearts were continually set on evil, he informed Noah, preserved him and his family, and he destroyed the wicked. Vanhoozer points out three issues for those who are "unwilling to accept the biblical accounts of God's speaking":

*First*, speaking is itself a form of action. If God can do anything, why can he not speak? The concept of a speech act is now well known; speakers not only produce sound or speech but, over and above these locutions, do other things as well such as promising, commanding, asserting, and so forth. These are actions or

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>10</sup>Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 22. Compare Vanhoozer: "Only speech disambiguates behavior. Only God's word disambiguates God's deed;" *Remythologizing Theology*, 213. See also idem, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Future: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 61-106.

<sup>11</sup>See Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 58, 195.

linguistic performances—the technical term is “illocution”: what is done *in* speaking—in their own right that call for description and understanding.

*Second*, apart from such speech acts, it is often impossible to tell what an agent may be up to. Nothing disambiguates an agent's behavior better than the agent's discourse.

*Third*, many of the things that Christians ascribe to God are inconceivable apart from concrete instances of divine discourse. Try, for example, to make a promise without using words or without performing some other communicative action. It is difficult to know how to count something in the world (e.g., a rainbow) as a divine promise unless it is accompanied by verbal communicative action that clarifies it.<sup>12</sup>

For those who confess there is a divine Being who can do anything, he can surely speak. He planted the ear, he formed the eye, he disciplines the nations. Therefore he hears, he sees, and he speaks (Exod 4:11; Ps 94:9-11). Since God can do all things, he surely is able to speak.<sup>13</sup> Not only does Scripture show that he speaks, but that what he communicates and what man hears will not fail and is not corrupted through the medium of sensory organs (Ps 119:9-16; Isa 5:9; 22:14; 50:4-5). What is more, his promises being true is directly proportional to his ability to bring history to obeisance to his words (Num 11:23; Judg 13:17; 2 Sam 7:28; 22:31; Ps 18:30; Prov 30:5; Dan 10:1; Rom 3:4; Rev 3:7, 14). As a result, anyone who wants to live will fashion his life according to the words of the Lord (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). This is the case because, as was seen above, God's being in himself ensures that what comes to pass will not thwart his plans or make his word be false. His plans will come to pass through his entering into covenant with creation and fulfilling the stipulations of that covenant himself. Scripture, therefore, is more than a

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>13</sup>See David Clark, “Beyond Inerrancy: Speech Acts and an Evangelical View of Scripture,” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 118.

collection of man's thoughts about God. It is the very record of the covenant the triune God effected. Vanhoozer writes,

The Christian canon, Old and New Testaments together is the book of the covenant that reaches its fullest expression in Jesus Christ. It is therefore proper to speak of a canonical covenant and of a covenantal canon. . . . The crucial point is that neither the covenant nor the canon can be reduced to a set of concepts. On the contrary, both covenant and canon are, like the gospel, essentially dramatic in nature—a matter of God engaging his creatures, covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers alike, in dialogical action.<sup>14</sup>

We have access to the real world through God's triune communicative action.

Sure, Scripture is not an encyclopedic collection of atemporal truths. It is a unified interpretation for creation as to what is wrong with it and how it ought to relate to its Creator. As John Frame says,

We discover the "real world" not only through sense-experience but also through rational concepts and subjective states and particularly through Scripture, our supreme criterion of reality. . . . God's revelation is able to penetrate our thoughts, so that even within our own subjectivity we are not without divine witness. Thus there is always a process of comparison between our thoughts and what God is showing us—a process of comparison that may be called a "search for correspondence."<sup>15</sup>

Frame rightly introduces the relationship between the objective and the subjective aspects of truth. The former aspect of truth corresponds to God's exhaustive knowledge of all there was, is, and will be in the world. He knows all things completely and truly. He is the only Being whose interpretation of the world is correct. The latter aspect of truth corresponds to our acceptance of that objective truth. Particularly, because people are finite and not able to comprehend the exhaustive knowledge that God has.

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<sup>14</sup>Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 64-65.

<sup>15</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 141. He additionally writes, "We learn of this sovereign God from Scripture; this is part of its message. But when we learn of such a God, we realize that such a God *must* identify himself. Such a God . . . identifies all the

Furthermore, the very nature of communication signs and symbols inhibit an exhaustive impartation and apprehension of infinite knowledge. Nevertheless, finite apprehension does not preclude true interpretations of the world. If God chooses to reveal himself through mediators, he will surely preserve them from error. Otherwise there would be no need to give an interpretation to humanity because man would not have the God's-eye-view of the world in order to adjudicate between truth and falsehood. Man, therefore, resides in a perpetual state of dependence on God's revelation and will never be able to stand over God's self-communication.<sup>16</sup>

Post-conservatives have focused on the one aspect of subjectivity (i.e., illumination) and overlapped that with authority. In other words, the fact that God's triune speech is authoritative irrespective of man's reception of it is avoided.<sup>17</sup> A fuller appreciation of the Holy Spirit's work is needed. What is needed is what Timothy Ward explains as the three-fold activity of the Spirit in relationship to God's Scripture: He is "the agent of God's *authoring* of Scripture . . . he *preserves* Scripture providentially . . . he is the one who *opens minds* to comprehend and hearts to trust what God says in Scripture."<sup>18</sup> Vanhoozer says so much when he writes,

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facts of the universe. In identifying all the facts of the universe he sets these facts in relation to one another." Ibid., 124.

<sup>16</sup>As Bernard Ramm has written, "The Protestant thus judges that both religious liberalism's subjectivism and Catholicism's ecclesiastical authoritarianism (as extreme as they are with regard to each other) are instances of the finite sitting in the place of the Infinite." Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 25.

<sup>17</sup>This will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

<sup>18</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 78-79; emphasis added. So Horton, "Our account of the canon as covenantal treaty affirms the priority of God, the character of the canon as divine summons, and the inseparable unity of Word and Spirit in founding and forming a faithful community around the substance of the covenant, Jesus Christ and all his benefits." Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 219.

The church acknowledges what the Bible is—divine discourse—but this acknowledgement does not make it so. The inspiration of Scripture in the past and the illumination of Scripture in the present are but twin moments of one continuous work of the Holy Spirit who, in the triune communicative economy, presents the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. A properly theological account of Scripture begins from the premise that God is a communicative agent, able to use language for communicative purposes.<sup>19</sup>

And again,

Scripture is more than a mere witness to God's actions in history and allocated insofar that God's people encounter the Spirit in the text of Scripture. This is an inadequate reflection of Scripture's description of its relation to God, to his acts in history and to his people. . . . It falls short of the relationship between God and his words implied in the covenantal nature of the redemption which God achieves for humanity.<sup>20</sup>

Ben Ollenberger astutely answers how Scripture's testimony is true and true to God. "This theological question cannot be pursued independent of the testimony itself, or independent of Scripture, because Scripture itself forms an integral part of the testimony. Apart from Scripture, the witnessing community cannot name the God on whose name it calls, to whom it testifies, and whom it praises—to whom it thereby professes truthfully to refer (ontologically)."<sup>21</sup> Mark D. Thompson concurs, "If God's speaking is an intentional communicative act and if the biblical text is caught up in that act, then God himself ensures that his purpose (whether for salvation or for judgment) will be accomplished."<sup>22</sup> What kind of omnipotent Being, who brought all that is into existence

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<sup>19</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>21</sup>Ben C. Ollenberger, "Pursuing the Truth of Scripture: Reflections on Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*," in *But Is It All True? The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 60.

<sup>22</sup>Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 2006), 78.

and upholds it by his self-existent power, would God be if he could not ensure his illocutions remained in the air and did not bring the seed to sprout or man to conversion (Isa 40:6-8; 1 Pet 1:22-25)? Frame responds,

If Scripture is his Word, then it must convey his ultimate authority and therefore be inerrant in all matters. . . . Thus, a word of God, giving his own authoritative promise of redemption, must be self-attesting. Scripture, as that Word, needs no corroboration from any source outside itself; and no such corroboration is possible, unless the other source is already subject to the interpretation and evaluation of Scripture. If Scripture is self-attesting, then it bears the traditional attributes—necessity, authority, perspicuity, and sufficiency.<sup>23</sup>

If someone responds that such a view is reductionistic, it would behoove him to explain why God's self-revelation does not carry appropriate weight and authority. If God's triune communication gives undue precedent to propositional truth, how are commands, promises, and exclamations true? David Clark writes, "The illocutionary force and the perlocutionary force of commands, promises, exclamations, and performatives must connect in complex ways to true statements."<sup>24</sup> To distrust one's propositions is to distrust him.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, God revealed himself to particular men to speak on his behalf. If they did not heed his spoken word, there would have been no written word. God's perpetual presence would not have been possible without his chosen agents.

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<sup>23</sup>John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 124.

<sup>24</sup>Clark, "Beyond Inerrancy," 123. Timothy Ward buttresses this statement when he writes, "Lest it be thought I am saying God is present in the force or intention of Scripture but not in its propositions, we should stress that any speech act is made up both of 'illocutionary force' . . . and of propositional content. Each of these is an abstraction of the unified reality of a speech act. Thus in the case of Scripture God is semantically present in both." Ward, *Words of Life*, 66n17. Also, "Language exchange between people, while of course including the communication of propositions, is fundamentally to do with something different and much more profound. It is to do with active relationships of trust and obligation between us." *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>25</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 59.

## God's Agents

The *Second Helvetic Confession* states:

And unless the Holy Spirit inwardly illumines him, yet we know that it is surely the will of God that his Word should be preached outwardly also. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, "He shall tell you what you ought to do."<sup>26</sup>

What is made clear here is that God could have revealed himself to whomever and however he desired. Affirming God's condescension does not mean that what Moses and the prophets heard had falsehood intermingled with it. Further, affirming God's reducing his spoken word to writing does not reduce his words' authority. If Israel disobeyed Moses' words, God considered them to have disobeyed his own words. Miriam and Dathan could not have pleaded that the words were unclear or there were bits of falsehood intermingled with what Moses said (Num 12:1-8). It is the height of presumption for man to stand over Scripture and assert falsity because God could not preserve the writings and his perlocutions from error. Just like God is able to bring his promises to fruition, so is the case with his chosen representatives, the prophets. Conversely, the prophetic word that does not come to pass is not a word from YHWH. "Whenever the prophet speaks in the name of YHWH, and the word does not exist and it does not come to pass, which is not a word from YHWH, the prophet has spoken from pride" (Deut 18:22; cf. Jer 42:5).

Similarly, the community of faith accepted the writings of those who spoke for God if they had been with Jesus (Mark 3:14; Acts 4:13). Jesus did not come to abolish the words of YHWH in the OT, but to bring them to their rightful τέλος (Matt 5:17; Luke

22:37; John 13:1; Rom 10:4). “His life, in both word and deed, fulfills the covenant.”<sup>27</sup> In light of his foreordination as the one to bring the OT to its rightful purpose, Jesus commissions his agents to speak in his stead. “The church was only willing to acknowledge as apostles those who had been commissioned to that office by God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Ward concludes,

The early church discerned in those texts it came to regard as scriptural: they bore the necessary marks of being words from the risen Christ, both in their content and *because of their authorship from within the early apostolic community*. Thus these Christ-given writings, authored by the apostles and their close associates, expounding and applying the meaning of Christ as the fulfillment of the covenant, constitute the New Testament as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

These commissioned representatives had the authority conferred upon them by God and had not need for verification by people. The community does not imbue the prophet with authority. The biblical record contradicts this claim in the narrative itself. Israel did not listen to the prophets. The prophets possessed a conferred/representative authority by YHWH. This is contrary to Burke Long, who writes, “Authority presupposes some degree of willing acceptance. . . . This comes closest to the situation of the biblical prophets, who were singularly dependent upon the acceptance by others for any measure

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<sup>26</sup>*Second Helvetic Confession*, Chapter 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 54.

<sup>28</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 291. See also Detlev Dormeyer and Massimo Grilli, *Gottes Wort in menschlicher Sprache* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 17-19—where signs and wonders go hand in hand with verification of the message.

<sup>29</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 54; emphasis added.

of authority which they might have exercised.”<sup>30</sup> Is this a true assessment of the facts in Scripture? What about Elijah being castigated by King Ahab and being run off and destitute to the degree that he thought he was alone? The prophets and apostles were able to stand outside of authority conferred by man, because the *a se* God had given them authority to stand over the people’s assumptions and misaligned allegiance.

### **Scripture’s Authority**

As stated earlier, Scripture is a covenantal document given by YHWH to his people.

The function of Scripture is to record, expound and apply this authority of God. . . . When we enter relationship with God on the basis of his covenant, we enter a relationship with one whose very words may be trusted completely. . . . God’s people have been bound to him through the words of promise called covenants; they have never been without the word of God; they have never been without his rule through his word; and these words may be found in the Scriptures.<sup>31</sup>

Promises are made that stand outside of men’s affirmation of them. Like God’s knowledge, which is not dependent upon creation, God’s Word is independent of creation’s affirmation or denial of it. As Terence Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich says, “Generally speaking, how one views the authority of the Bible is closely dependent on one’s imaging of God; the way a reader relates to God will decisively shape how that reader relates to the Bible.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Burke O. Long, “Prophetic Authority as Social Reality,” in *Cannon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 4.

<sup>31</sup>Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 82-83.

<sup>32</sup>Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 97.

We must understand that God speaks and that his speech must not be confined to aural content. Nineteenth century theologian John Clifford lucidly wrote, “Literature is spoken thought. Speech is the soul made vocal. You must know the soul of a book to get at its power, know it not only intellectually and as an objective, but sympathetically, with your own soul, through actual identification, of your own feeling and purpose and aim, *i.e.*, through a faith which carries you out of yourself and brings you into vital fellowship with the author.”<sup>33</sup> The written word is the soul made visible. John Owen presses the relationship further:

God speaking *in* the penman of the Scripture, (Heb. i.1,) his voice to them was accompanied with its own evidence, which gave assurance unto them; and God speaking *by* them or their writings unto us, his word is accompanied with its own evidence, and gives assurance unto us. His authority and veracity did, and do, in the one and the other, sufficiently manifest themselves, that men may quietly repose their souls upon them, in believing and obedience.<sup>34</sup>

Wolterstorff suggests that

instead of thinking of the Bible in terms of revelation, we think in terms of speech; second, that instead of giving priority to speech as symbol-system, we give priority to speech as action, as discourse; third, that within discourse we distinguish between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts; and fourth, that we understand how it might be that God speaks—that is, performs illocutionary acts—by way of the writing and speaking of biblical writers.<sup>35</sup>

Imagine a man who is mute and can only tell his friends and family his wishes by way of writing them down on a pad of paper. Does his demand for them to fetch him some tea any less true or perlocutionary because he has reduced his desire to writing? Of course

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<sup>33</sup>John Clifford, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London: James Clarke, 1899), 177-78.

<sup>34</sup>John Owen, *Of the Divine Originals in The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 307.

not. Those who affirm that Scripture is to be heeded because it contains the earliest documents of incorporation for the community of faith—as many have perceived the Spirit speaking through the text—deny the very Spirit who inspired those texts. They have made inspiration nothing more than Scripture’s authors as being enlightened men reflecting on the divine. Scripture itself points us to the bearing along by the Spirit to ensure the covenantal claims be carried into the end of the age for God’s people.

Although Wolterstorff is extremely helpful in his utilization of speech-act theory in order to understand the function of Scripture, his resistance to affirming inerrancy compromises Scripture’s ontology. Ollenberger offers a helpful corrective. In reply to Wolterstorff’s analysis of truth—i.e., “Does this measure up?”—he says: “How would we go about answering that question? In one sense, *Divine Discourse* already presupposes an answer. If God appropriated the Bible as a medium of divine discourse, then Scripture must be, in the most important respects, faithful to God—if only by God’s decision that it be so.”<sup>36</sup>

Insofar that it goes this is a fine assessment. However, what does Wolterstorff mean by “faithful to God”? Ollenberger continues, “Is its testimony true, and is it true to God? Along the lines Lash sets out, we should understand the testimony of the Christian community as embodied witness, and the community itself as an enacted commentary on

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<sup>35</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, “True Words,” in *But Is It All True? The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 36.

<sup>36</sup>Ollenberger, “Pursuing the Truth of Scripture,” 58-59.

Scripture. Our questions about Scripture's truth invite and entail communal self-criticism—before God and thus also in the company of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup>

Ollenberger criticizes Wolterstorff for committing the kernel-husk dichotomy of Scripture.<sup>38</sup> That is, if the very words of Scripture are not inerrant, in what way can we reliably say that what we perceive as God’s illocutions are accurate and inerrant. This is a tenable critique, since Wolterstorff would affirm a double agency view of Scripture. By saying Wolterstorff’s theory succumbs to a kernel-husk dichotomy, nuance to his view is lost. It would be better to ask, “How does one determine divine speech from human speech in the text?” It appears that the two agents in inscripturation are spoken of as speaking the same, verbatim message. Yet Wolterstorff says, “Divine inspiration and divine discourse are distinct, albeit inter-related, phenomena.”<sup>39</sup> In what way are they distinct? How does the reader know when there is overlap and when there is distinction?

As Ward writes,

Inerrancy is no more than a natural *implication* of inspiration. . . . Yet neither is it anything less than a *natural* implication of inspiration. It is a true feature of Scripture, flowing from the character of God, and from the fact that he has chosen to relate to us through words he speaks to us. . . . To reject inerrancy in favour of infallibility is to make the mistake of pretending that the purposes for which God spoke Scripture can safely be separated from many of the propositional statements he makes through Scripture, leaving us to trust his purposes in Scripture, while questioning many of his propositional statements.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 54-55. Horton also responds to Wolterstorff, “It would seem that *covenant* provides a broader and or definite context for discourse (that God speaks) and canonicity (that God speaks *here*).” Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 138. As a result, we must always distinguish between divine discourse and interpretation—the words of Job’s friends were not God’s words, but are incorporated and appropriated into the canon of Scripture, which is God’s words to us.

<sup>39</sup>Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 283.

<sup>40</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 135, 137.

As Christians our defense of inerrancy is not merely a matter of wrangling about nomenclature. Rather, its defense is vital in offering confidence in the Scriptures and providing a foundation (or integrating framework) for all knowledge. The early church believed there was no higher authority than the Scriptures in matters of faith and life. As the desire for sure footing continued and the failure to iterate the vitality of Scripture's authority of its own merit, the church's authority slowly usurped Scripture's perspicuity and authority. How did the church get Scripture? Was it due to man's selection of particular texts or was it due to an authority that inhered in the text itself? The Protestants knew that if the church selected the texts, then man stood as judge over God's words.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of whether it was one man or a magisterium, humans cannot determine Scripture. As a result, the Protestant Reformation sounded the trumpet of Scripture's self-attesting authority—for no man could stand over Scripture. Consequentially, Scripture became the explicit ground for how man is able to speak about God (systematic theology). If one denies Scripture's self-witness, then he must substitute another authority than God's own words concerning himself.

### **Scripture's Self-Attestation as Theology's Ground**

As Vanhoozer has written, "The pathway into the doctrine of Holy Scripture is neither simple nor straightforward: it intersects with the doctrine of God—in particular, the doctrine of providence—and with theories concerning the nature of language and

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<sup>41</sup>As Owen wrote, "The evidence of the mission of such a [sent] one, and the authority of God speaking in him—our Saviour being judge—is not of an efficacy to enforce belief, beyond that which is in the written Word, nor a surer foundation for faith to repose itself upon." Owen, *Works*, vol. 16, 317. And again, "What does it [the written Word] urge for its acceptance? Tradition, authority of the church, miracles, consent of men? or doth it speak αυτοκρατορικως, and stand only upon its own sovereignty?" *Ibid.*, 315.

literature.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, “One’s view of Scripture is always correlated to one’s view of God: no doctrine of Scripture without a doctrine of providence.”<sup>43</sup> As evidenced above, God is independent of creation and brings to pass all that happens in creation. If he is able to create all things and can do all things, he most assuredly can speak to it.

Scripture’s self-witness is not a tautology—God’s speech is God’s speech—but is a necessary affirmation for being able to locate, repeat, and rehearse God’s speech. As mentioned above, God stands over all creation and is the objective standard under which all subjects must conform. God chose agents to speak for him—men who stood over the culture of their day and demanded repentance and faith by virtue of their divine calling. God must give his interpretation of the facts of history, but he also must convert his subject’s fallen hearts to recognize and embrace and submit his life to God’s interpretation. This is the subjective aspect of Scripture’s self-witness—discerning the voice of the Spirit in the text.

What has gone awry, however, is that post-conservatives have used postmodern linguistic theory to say that all human interpretations are just that, interpretations. This has led to a tendency to locate authority outside the text of Scripture—i.e., the Spirit speaking in the text (which is determined by a subjective determination as to when he speaks). If tradition adjudicates authority for the objective witness of Scripture (or by bifurcating Scripture from God), then affirmations of inerrancy become inconsequential. An example of such thinking is found in Paul D. Hanson, when he writes,

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<sup>42</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech-Acts,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, eds. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 148.

What has commonly been construed as an authority characterized by immutability is redefined as an authority *encountered in scripture*—as in contemporary life—which is dynamic, living, unfolding. The ultimate referent is God, who is confessed as a creative, liberating, sustaining Agent who is deeply involved in all creation, and whose activity—and by inference from that activity, whose nature and will is recorded in a *unique way* in scripture.<sup>44</sup>

Scripture is unique in that authority is encountered in Scripture. He believes that to affirm internal contradictions does not denigrate the authority of Scripture. The problem is that authority is dependent on truthfulness. Further, God's words are the expression of God's authority and must not be seen as derivative of his authority.

Where then is the ability to adjudicate across cultures? If one opts for Scripture's self-witness, where does the church's tradition get placed in interpretation? Vanhoozer is helpful, "If it is interpretation 'all the way down,' where does one locate authority in the Scripture/tradition relation? One increasingly popular postmodern answer is to locate it not in the author's individual subjective consciousness, but in the communal consciousness of the interpreting community. . . . On this approach, the task of theology is to describe Christian language in the context of the Christian form of life."<sup>45</sup> His

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Paul D. Hanson, "The Theological Significance of Contradiction within the Book of the Covenant," in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 131; emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 160-61. He explains Lindbeck's theory, as it has greatly influenced post-conservatives: "On Lindbeck's view, Scripture is the paradigmatic interpretive framework that the community uses to understand the world and its identity. However, Scripture can only be rightly understood from within the believing community. . . . Tradition is the process of socialization in which members are taught how to use Scripture Christianly. Theology, in turn, becomes a species of ethnography, whose task is to describe, much like the cultural anthropologist, the rules that govern the life and language of the Christian community." Ibid., 161.

corrective: “We need to view Scripture in terms of divine discourse and tradition in terms of divine deed.”<sup>46</sup> Timothy Ward says so much when he writes,

The right solution is not to propose a doctrine of Scripture that moves away from the testimony of God gives in Scripture regarding the nature of Scripture, for that would separate the authority of Christ from those words of his that in fact need to be brought to bear with greater authority. The right way forward is rather to pay more appropriate attention to the content, form and aims of Scripture as God has in fact given it to us.<sup>47</sup>

Bernard Ramm makes a tight connection between the content, form, and aims of Scripture with the work of the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit expresses His authority in the Scriptures. Information about the Holy Spirit is contained in the Scriptures, as is knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. This constitutes a pattern of knowledge and experience, and any effort to isolate one part from the rest of the pattern constitutes a gross error.”<sup>48</sup>

Vanhoozer further explains, “The Bible is not Scripture simply because an interpretive community decides to use it as such. On the contrary, it is the divine decision to authorize, appropriate, assume, and annex these human communicative acts into the economy of revelation and reconciliation.”<sup>49</sup> With both the distinction between divine discourse and divine deed, he shows the relationship between the objective norm that stands over man and man’s subjective appropriation of that norm in his life. He writes,

Scripture continues to be the supreme norm for Christian faith and life, then, not as an epistemic norm that caters to modernity's craving for certainty, but as a

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>47</sup>Ward, *Words of Life*, 74. See also Irenaeus’ discussion in chap. 2 where we wouldn’t know the Christ apart from Scripture.

<sup>48</sup>Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority*, 34.

<sup>49</sup>Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 165.

*sapiential* norm that provides direction for one's fitting participation in the great evangelical drama of redemption. Scripture is the script to which the church constantly refers as it performs and improvises parables of the kingdom of God on the changing scenes of the world stage.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, "Tradition's authority derives from its ministry of the Word, from its ability to direct us to the Christ attested in Scripture."<sup>51</sup>

What then is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium internum Spiritu Sancti*)? It is not merely individualistic—so that someone says, "I like Jesus' words because God really spoke to me, but I don't like what Paul said." "The inner testimony of the Spirit is hardly something *alongside* the Word, but is effected from *within* the Word."<sup>52</sup> Van den Belt insightfully writes, "If the *testimonium* is only an individual witness of the Spirit to Scripture, it is a form of circular reasoning because then Scripture is proved from the *testimonium* and the *testimonium* is proved from Scripture. The *testimonium internum*, however, is not individualistic, but related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture and confirmed by the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the church."<sup>53</sup> The Spirit's inner testimony provides a deeper conviction than syllogisms since it is sealed upon the heart.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>52</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 209; emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup>Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 287. He adds, in relation to an individual's sureness in which he stands in the Spirit's internal witness that God is speaking in *this* text: "The *testimonium* is not always equally strong and clear in the heart of the individual believer because it is intimately tied in with a person's life of faith and is subject to doubt and opposition." Ibid., 291. John Owen agrees. Contra collective subjectivity he writes, "Is the reason hereof, because I live among those who have this tradition, and they are my neighbours whom I know? By the same rule those who live among the other parts of men are bound to receive what they deliver them upon tradition; and so men may be obliged to believe the Koran to be the word of God. It is more probably, it will be answered, that their testimony is to be received because they are the church of God. But it doth not yet appear that I can any other way have the knowledge of them so to

In this way, individual decision or reason does not become the arbiter of truth.

Bernard Ramm highlights this and is worth quoting at length:

It is urged that if a Christian chooses the Bible as his authority on the grounds of reason, then reason and not Scripture is his real authority. The grounds for accepting an authority, and the right of the authority are two different matters. Reason, or intuition, or an inclination are *modes* of perceiving and receiving an authority, but they do not constitute the right of the authority received. . . . If the living God has spoken, His word of revelation is the authority in religion. If this word of revelation is made permanent through writing, then the written revelation is our authority in religion. A man accepts this written revelation as his authority in religion by personal appropriation. But whatever the subjective ground for receiving this revelation might be, it neither constitutes nor compromises the authority of the divine revelation. . . . No wedge can be driven between the Spirit and the Bible, the Bible and Christ, and Christ and the Spirit. They form an inseparable mosaic of divine authority.<sup>55</sup>

The natural man (to borrow Scripture's language) does not like to rest on an autonomy outside himself.<sup>56</sup> The alternative for the natural man, who affirms naturalism must also succumb to a belief outside of reason. He submits his life and logic to chance. Van Til explains, "If the whole course of history is, at least in part, controlled by chance, then there is no danger that the autonomous man will ever meet the claims of authority as the

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be, or of any authority that any number of men (more or less) can have in this case, under that name or notion, unless by the Scripture itself. And if so, it will quickly appear what place is to be allotted to their testimony, who cannot be admitted as witnesses unless the Scripture itself be owned and received; because they have neither plea nor claim to be so admitted but only from Scripture." Owen, *Works*, vol. 16, 332.

<sup>54</sup>As Owen writes, "Although a man be furnished with external arguments of all sorts concerning the divine original and authority of the Scriptures, although he esteem his motives of credibility to be effectually persuasive, and have the authority of any or all the churches in himself of its divine power, authority, and efficacy, he neither doth nor can believe it to be the word of God in a due manner,—with faith divine and supernatural. But he that hath this experience hath that testimony in himself which will never fail." Owen, *Works*, vol. 16, 94.

<sup>55</sup>Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority*, 41, 46.

<sup>56</sup>1 Cor 2:14; Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 162.

Protestant believes in it. For the notion of authority is but the expression of the idea that God by his counsel controls all things that happen in the course of history.”<sup>57</sup>

Scripture attests to its own authority because it is integrally related to the God who attests to his authority. Van Til says so much,

It is precisely because God is the kind of God he is, that his revelation is, in the nature of the case, self-attesting. In particular, it should be noted that such a God as the Scripture speaks of is everywhere self-attesting. . . . *It must be noted that man cannot look anywhere but that he confronts God, and God is self-attesting. Natural or general revelation speaks with as much authority and as directly as does the Bible, albeit in a different manner and not on redemption.* It is this complementary and supplementary character of supernatural and natural revelation that must be borne in mind when approach is made to the question of the indications of the divinity of Scripture.<sup>58</sup>

God makes claims over all creation as its Creator. His own testimony who he is and his interpretation of the purposes for his world must be the starting place for theology.

Scripture’s own testimony to its authority is the only ground that is sustainable—for councils and exegetes err. Subjects of the King (collectively and individually) do not determine Scripture’s authority, but God attests his own words and must be the starting place for theology.

Systematic theologians must never forget that the worldview Christians offer is diametrically opposed to the world into which it offers its interpretation. Van Til writes,

God's work of redemption through Christ, therefore, comes into enemy territory. It comes to save from themselves those who do not want to be saved, because they think that they do not need to be saved. It is this situation, as has been indicated by Reformed theologians, that accounts for the need of inscripturation of the authoritative and redemptive Word of God. But this view of sin itself comes from

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 165; Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1961), 70.

<sup>58</sup>Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 31; emphasis added.

Scripture as authoritative. Experience apart from Scripture does not teach such a doctrine.<sup>59</sup>

It has been stated already, but it bears repeating: Scripture's authority is independent of anyone's affirmation of it as authoritative. Illumination is vital for the subject,<sup>60</sup> but it is not determinative for the object. "The Spirit is not a secondary source for divine revelation in addition to scripture, but the latter's author as well as illuminator. The canon is revelation regardless of a given person's response, but it can only be recognized as such though the event of illumination."<sup>61</sup>

Scripture's self-witness is both fearful for the autonomous man as well as liberating. It is fearful because the right interpretation resides outside of man's ability to understand. Yet it is liberating in that the correct interpretation of the world is knowable and is not dependent on one's ability. Confidence, therefore, is possible insofar that the interpreter rests in the objective word given by the *a se* God and on his sealing it upon the

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>60</sup>G. C. Berkouwer writes, "Only the Holy Spirit himself can give certainty and conquer all doubts; even though man himself is directly involved in every aspect of his life, the *auctoritas divina* is all-pervasive. Hence, by saying that the 'ultimate basis of faith is in the religious subject,' Bavinck does not mean that it is not God but man who creates certainty; on the contrary, 'the subject does not create the truth; it only recognized and acknowledges it.' That is why he can say in one breath that the ultimate basis of faith lies in the religious subject and that Holy Scripture is self-authenticating, the final ground of faith, and add to it that 'carefully speaking,' the testimony of the Spirit is not the ultimate ground. Thus, it is not the testimony of man's own spirit but the testimony of God that causes man to rest in his salvation." G. C. Berkouwer, "The Testimony of the Spirit," in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 163-64.

<sup>61</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 209. So also John Murray: "The internal testimony of the Spirit is the necessary complement to the witness Scripture inherently bears to its plenary inspiration. The two pillars of true faith in Scripture as God's Word are the objective witness and the internal testimony. The objective witness furnishes us with a conception of Scripture that provides the proper basis for the ever-active sealing operation of the Spirit of truth. The internal testimony insures that this objective witness elicits the proper response in the human consciousness. The sealing function of the Spirit finds its complete explanation and validation in the pervasive witness that Scripture bears to its own divine origin and authority. And the witness to plenary inspiration receives its constant confirmation in the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in the hearts of believers." John Murray, "The

heart by his Spirit. The gospel is God's testimony concerning himself in the person of God the Son by the power and effectual working of God the Spirit.

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Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 53-54.

## CHAPTER 7

### DEFINITION AND APPLICATION OF *AUTOPISTIA*

In this final chapter all the various strands will be pulled together to offer a positive definition of the doctrine of Scripture's self-authentication as well as application of the doctrine as it pertains to tradition, epistemology, theological methodology, and apologetics. Chapter 3 sought to represent the exemplars of post-conservative theological methodology, John R. Franke and the late Stanley J. Grenz. This was seen as necessary, as this dissertation resides in the Evangelical stream of tradition and believes it necessary to explain how some within the Evangelical camp have sought to define and practice the theological discipline—namely, how post-conservative evangelicals have disavowed Scripture's self-attesting authority. This chapter offers a critique of their methodology (in their denial of Scripture's self-attestation), putting forth the Protestant doctrine of Scripture's self-authenticating character. After a definition is set forth, *autopistia's* application to tradition and culture is treated—showing the flaws in post-conservative conceptions of Scripture's reliance upon tradition and culture. Since post-conservatives have utilized findings from RE, this chapter will also reorient their interpretation of RE—as well reorient the Reformed doctrine of *autopistia*, in distinction to how it is used by RE. *Autopistia's* application to theological method is demonstrated, which naturally leads to a discussion of its application to apologetics.

## Definition of Scripture's Self-Attestation

And so the last five chapters have led us to this point in a succinct statement on what *autopistia* is and how it is necessary for theological method. Scripture's self-authenticating character can be defined as follows: *Scripture grounds its own authority. God appointed his representatives in space and time to speak on his behalf for the faith and obedience of humanity. Scripture's authority is both objectively true (by virtue of God's action, speaking, and authorizing it to be written) and subjectively affirmed (by virtue of the testimony of the Holy Spirit). Therefore, Scripture grounds its own authority; it is God's word, his covenant document for his people.*

## Inerrancy and Infallibility

If Scripture claims the highest authority for man, then it must be without error. For if there is an error in the written word of God, it cannot originate with him—since God is without error. There has been quite a debate in Evangelicalism with regards to whether there are errors in Scripture (inerrancy) or if Scripture's purposes do not err (infallibility). The terms *infallibility* and *inerrancy* are two aspects of the same reality. *Infallibility* speaks about the illocutionary stance of Scripture; *inerrancy* speaks about the locutions of the text. David Clark says, "The illocutionary force and the perlocutionary force of commands, promises, exclamations, and performatives must connect in complex ways to true statements."<sup>1</sup> This is to say, the meaning of words (and their truthfulness) cannot be disconnected from the words themselves. Inerrancy is a result of infallibility.

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<sup>1</sup>David Clark, "Beyond Inerrancy: Speech Acts and an Evangelical View of Scripture," in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids:

Additionally, if the locutions of the text contain error, then the very inspiration of Scripture is fallible.

Affirming inerrancy does not mean that the church should read Scripture as a science book—as though these are texts that merely state the way the world is. It is more than this, though not less. Scripture presents itself as reporting fact—Joshua and Israel partially conquered the Land, King David committed adultery and murder, Israel was exiled. Yet it also interprets these facts—the partial conquering was due to unbelief, adultery was committed due to jealousy, exile took place because of idolatry. Scripture does not present itself as human commentary on the facts of history, but it roots itself in the divine authorization and inspiration by the Holy Spirit of these authors.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the history of religions school errs by failing to read the Bible as it presents itself—authored by God. The neo-orthodox school errs by failing to read the Bible as objectively grounded in history and its belief that God is unable to preserve his Word in light of human finitude. That is, the history presented in Scripture actually happened, and God determined to record these events for his covenant people. Neo-orthodoxy speaks about Scripture’s purposes as though they can be divorced from truthful interpretations, divine interpretations, of history. Gleason Archer aptly summarizes:

We are faced with a basic choice in the matter of biblical authority. Either we receive the Scripture as completely reliable and trustworthy in every matter it

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Baker, 2006), 123. See also Stanley N. Gundry, “John Owen on Authority and Scripture,” in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 221.

<sup>2</sup>As Jensen has written, “To say that the Bible is covenantal establishes the authorship of God and hence the authority and nature of the Scriptures. . . . [The term *inspiration*] has the benefit of introducing the work of the Spirit into a consideration of the Scriptures. The link between the Spirit and the one who brings the word is frequently made. . . . It was the business of the inspired prophet not to offer philosophical observations, but to communicate divine truths. The authority of the message arose not from the prophet but from the divine source.” Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 156-57.

records, affirms, or teaches, or else it comes to us as a collection of religious writings containing both truth and error. If it does contain mistakes in the original manuscripts, then it ceases to be unconditionally authoritative. It must be validated and endorsed by our own human judgment before we can accept it as true.<sup>3</sup>

At root is the question of epistemology. How does finite man know what he knows?

Further, man does not have the authority to adjudicate what people all over the world must believe. At best, he can put forward strong suggestions for how people in his community *ought* to live. Yet he can never jump the geographical and cultural divide that exists between him and someone else. Therefore, there is a need for an infinite word, an unbounded word—not subject to culture or time. Surely, finite humans will always receive this infinite word in the garb of culture and time, but the story transcends time and space and gives the eternal word. This word that persists until the end of time is Scripture. Scripture places itself in a preeminent position by virtue of its true representation of the world by God.<sup>4</sup> Confusion of late stems from a “fundamental confusion of meaning and truth.”<sup>5</sup> That is, the “new hermeneutic” (as proposed by Paul Achtemeier) pushes inerrancy to mean that both the words of Scripture and subsequent interpretations of Scripture must be without error.<sup>6</sup> Further, objective truth is elusive

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<sup>3</sup>Gleason L. Archer, “The Witness of the Bible to Its Own Inerrancy,” in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 93.

<sup>4</sup>See D. A. Carson’s comments in “Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 86-89. See particularly his comments on p. 88: “One might suggest that the purpose of Scripture is to bring glory to God, or to explain truthfully God’s nature and plan of redemption to a fallen race in order to bring many sons to glory: under such definitions of ‘purpose’ the comprehensiveness of Scripture’s truth claims cannot be so easily circumvented.”

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

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

because finite human beings can never arrive at consensus on interpretation.<sup>7</sup> “The Protestant thus judges that both religious liberalism’s subjectivism and Catholicism’s ecclesiastical authoritarianism (as extreme as they are with regard to each other) are instances of the finite sitting in the place of the Infinite.”<sup>8</sup> Ramm writes again, “The Holy Spirit expresses His authority in the Scriptures. Information about the Holy Spirit is contained in the Scriptures, as is knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ. This constitutes a pattern of knowledge and experience, and any effort to isolate one part from the rest of the pattern constitutes a gross error.”<sup>9</sup>

It is foolish to bifurcate the idea and the message of Scripture as though one can be true while the other one have errors. If both stem from the same mind, then there can be no contradiction.<sup>10</sup> “The message of Scripture . . . is a message of grace from a God who is absolutely sovereign and speaks with absolute authority. If Scripture is his Word, then it must convey his ultimate authority and therefore be inerrant in all matters.”<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that Scripture comes to us wedded to a historical tradition. The two are distinct, however. What was of utmost importance to Calvin and the Reformers was to show that Scripture did not *receive* its authority from the Tradition. It is plain to see that the words of Jesus constituted (in a technical sense) the church. He called

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 25.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>10</sup>See the discussion on Augustine earlier in chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup>John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 124.

disciples from their nets. He called people out of their religion. He called people by his Spirit through the preaching of the apostles. These *ekklesia* gathered together because they first heard a word from the Divine. They did not gather themselves and form a constitution from texts. The texts were prior to the community because the Person was prior to texts. Michael Horton writes,

If a church succumbs to the temptation of reducing the other to itself, this violence is destructive of its very identity and legitimacy. The ‘summons’ element is retained only if the word-canon is external not only to the individual but to the church, that is, if the church, instead of finding her decisions and actions ‘rubber-stamped,’ finds herself scrutinized, unsettled, disturbed—that is to say, *addressed*.<sup>12</sup>

### **Application of the Doctrine to Tradition and Culture**

John Owen comments,

Surely men will not say, that the Scripture hath its power to command in the name of God from any thing but itself. And it is, indeed, a contradiction for men to say that they give authority to the Scriptures. . . . The reason why they give authority unto it is the formal reason of all its authority, which it hath antecedently to their charter and concession of power.<sup>13</sup>

It must be remembered that God’s Word *necessarily* calls out a community. That is, tradition cannot be abrogated in an effort to do theology. As Ollenberger writes, tradition informs and serves as guardrails on one’s interpretation of Scripture. He writes, “We should understand the testimony of the Christian community as embodied witness, and the community itself as an enacted commentary on Scripture. Our questions about Scripture’s truth invite and entail communal self-criticism—before God and thus also in

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<sup>12</sup>Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 218.

the company of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, the tradition is essential as the contemporary theologian stands a witness to the perpetual enlightenment of the Holy Spirit—regardless of time and culture. As Trueman says, “The notion of *sola scriptura*, scripture alone, was something which accentuated scripture as the ultimate normative authority by which all theological formulations were to be judged; it was not something which meant that Christianity had to be reinvented every Sunday, or which claimed that scripture could ever be read in a vacuum.”<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately this has been the practice of many Evangelicals.<sup>16</sup> Having taken the Protestant polemic to ends which were not intended, many have claimed the Bible *only* is the Christians authority. Tradition, however, does serve as an authority for the believer, albeit a derived and secondary authority, whether acknowledged or not by him. Reading Scripture, by its very nature, interprets the text through a certain cultural grid. Nothing people experience is without interpretation. Yet, the church has sought to defend the circularity of tradition and hermeneutics present in a strong perspectivalism.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>John Owen, *On the Divine Originals* in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 308; cf. idem, *The Reason of Faith* in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 91-94.

<sup>14</sup>Ben C. Ollenberger, “Pursuing the Truth of Scripture: Reflections on Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*,” in *But Is It All True: The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 63.

<sup>15</sup>Carl Trueman, “Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology,” in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology*, eds. Neil B. MacDonald and Carl R. Trueman (Crown Hill, U.K.: Paternoster, 2008), 5.

<sup>16</sup>In mind here are congregants who claim that it is just them and their Bible as well as conservatives who claim, “No creed but the Bible” or liberals who claim, “No creed but Christ.” See D. Matthew Allen, “Confessional Christianity,” *Founder’s Journal* 58 (Fall 2004): 23-27.

<sup>17</sup>See Paul van Buren, *Theological Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); James Wm. McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Pluralism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994). This inevitably leads to a discussion on the perspicuity, or clarity, of Scripture. I refer the reader to Mark Thompson’s excellent monograph *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), especially his helpful discussion in chapter 2, “The Effective

Jesus' death on a Roman cross has worldwide implications of deontological magnitude that all men from every tribe, tongue, and people must worship him (Phil 2:9-11; Eph 1:11-23; cf. Isa 45:22-23). For he is the One who made all men (Col 1:16-17; 1 Cor 8:6). The relationship between the facts of history and and their interpretation—which is Scripture—is crucial to reading the Bible on its own terms.<sup>18</sup> World's history needs God's interpretation. He orchestrates history and provides interpreters throughout time. He has given the contemporary believer the church universal to help him understand and apply Scripture to his life. As Stonehouse wrote, "Tradition, in truth, is a factor of great significance within the history of special revelation itself. This is bound up especially with the fact that the special revelation of the Bible is a revelation of history."<sup>19</sup> Richard Bauckham presses the unassailability of tradition even further:

Michael Polanyi's philosophy of science, concur in reminding us of the point—so obvious once we have grasped it—that we all, even the most critical and original thinkers, depend on a body of corporate knowledge, much of which has to be taken on trust, and a "fiduciary framework" (Polanyi) of fundamental attitudes which

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Communicator: God as the Guarantor of Scriptural Clarity," 49-80. In it Thompson works from the (correct) assumption that "the gospel makes clear that God's overarching purpose is to be known, not hidden. . . . The fragility of human language can be overstated. In reality, verbal communication succeeds most of the time, and when it doesn't, it is not at all clear that language itself is the problem." Ibid., 68-69. In essence, words (communicative acts) have their origin in God. Finitude does not negate truthfulness. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 201-80. For a helpful historical analysis of modern theological construals of Scripture's objective-subjective relationship see Richard Topping, *Revelation, Scripture and Church: Theological Hermeneutic Thought of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Frei* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). For additional discussion on a "hermeneutics of certitude" see James H. Olthius, "Proposal for a Hermeneutics of Ultimacy," in *A Hermeneutics of Ultimacy: Peril or Promise?* (New York: University Press of America, 1987), 11-52.

<sup>18</sup>See Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 140-41. See the "History and Narrative" section below.

<sup>19</sup>Ned B. Stonehouse, "The Infallibility of Scripture and Evangelical Progress," in *Quo Vadis, Evangelicalism: Perspectives on the Past, Direction for the Future; Presidential Addresses from the First Fifty Years of the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 31; emphasis added.

shape the way we test and acquire knowledge. *A tradition of corporate belief is not, as such, the antithesis of reason, but its condition.*<sup>20</sup>

Tradition makes rational interpretation possible. The corporate testimony of the Spirit is vital to cohesive interpretation. As Henk van den Belt has written, “The *testimonium internum* . . . is not individualistic, but related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture and confirmed by the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the church.”<sup>21</sup> The Spirit’s testimony to the spirit of the individual cannot be divorced from the Spirit’s testimony to the spirit of the community. He not only enabled the community to recognize his speaking in the writings of the prophets and apostles, but he also helps distinguish orthodoxy from heresy.<sup>22</sup>

### **Post-conservatives, Tradition, and Theological Method**

In discussing the importance of tradition to theological method, it is apt to evaluate the work of Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke at this point due to their emphasis on the community of faith. Whereas they state that Scripture is the *normans normata*, it appears that the other two sources (tradition and culture) place impetus in the community (past and present, respectively), so that they determine what Scripture is and how it is normative for the community. That is to say, since the reader is so rooted in culture, the culture becomes determinative for what Scripture actually says. They have

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<sup>20</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, “Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason,” in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine; Essays in Honor of Richard P. C. Hanson*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 133; emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup>Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 287.

<sup>22</sup>This enters into a discussion of the community’s role in interpretation. A subject which this work cannot treat sufficiently.

determined what God says today by what coalesces with what is acceptable in the culture today.<sup>23</sup> Nassif sets the priority of Scripture aright when he says:

By the end of first century that apostolic tradition was enshrined in written texts. The Church later decided which texts constituted the canon of Scripture by “recognizing” their apostolic origins, content, and usage within the worshiping community. Better yet, the Spirit embraced the Church with the Spirit’s own canon. This does not mean that Scripture owes its inherent authority to the Church. Authority comes only from the Spirit of God and not a legal institution such as a papacy or a Church council as such. The Church was inseparably united with its sacred texts as the *mediating* authority that simply authenticated what was already there within its own life. *Thus when the Church accepted the books of the canon it was also accepting the ongoing, Spirit-led authority of the Church’s tradition, which recognized, interpreted, worshipped, and corrected itself by the witness of Holy Scripture.*<sup>24</sup>

Grenz and Franke understand the post-conservative proposal as following the Pietistic roots of evangelicalism. That is, the main concern of Christian theology should be convertive and not doctrinal. Whereas those who have imbibed the Enlightenment’s *ad fontes*, the post-conservative will seek to hear and appropriate the pneumatological discourse in Scripture. Franke writes, “The close connection that the Reformers sought to maintain between [Word and Spirit] means that the authority of Scripture is not ultimately invested in any particular quality that inheres in the text itself, but that its

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<sup>23</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 85; John Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory: Theology and the Nonfoundationalist Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 113. The Spirit’s voice, however, can only be discerned as it is sifted through the interpretive grid of the Spirit’s voice in the Scripture; see Franke, “Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory,” 114. Vanhoozer offers his critique of this assertion by asking for biblical support. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Disputing About Words? Of Fallible Foundations and Modest Metanarratives,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 187-200. So also Chauncy Everett Berry, “Revising Evangelical Theological Method in the Postmodern Context: Stanley J. Grenz and Kevin J. Vanhoozer as Test Cases” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 104.

<sup>24</sup>Bradley Nassif, “‘Authority’ in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition,” in *By What Authority? The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2010), 38; emphasis added.

authority is based on the work of the Spirit who speaks in and through the text.”<sup>25</sup> This, unfortunately, sounds like a reader-response theory of knowledge so that what should concern the contemporary theologian is his appropriation of the text over that of authorial intent.<sup>26</sup> The Protestant way forward is to affirm the marriage between the Word and the Spirit so that what Scripture says, the Spirit says. The authority of the Spirit speaking in the text is *a priori*, not *a posteriori*.<sup>27</sup> This is the main difference between what post-conservatives teach and what has been historically affirmed by Protestants. That is, the Spirit inspires and speaks in the text of Scripture; he does isolate and appropriate words from the text. Rather, the entire text is his word to his people. Vanhoozer puts it succinctly: “The Bible is not Scripture simply because an interpretive community decides to use it as such. On the contrary, it is the divine decision to authorize, appropriate, assume, and annex these human communicative acts into the economy of revelation and reconciliation.”<sup>28</sup>

Grenz and Franke helpfully draw attention to the wedding of Spirit and Word. After all, Calvin is the theologian of the Holy Spirit. Grenz, however, draws an unhelpful dichotomy in interpreting Luther—and by extension the Reformers. He claims that

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<sup>25</sup>John R. Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of *Sola Scriptura*,” in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 202. Cf. Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 84.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. R. G. Tanner, “The Use of the Old Testament in St. Augustine’s *De civitate dei*,” in *The Bible and European Literature: History and Hermeneutics*, ed. Eric Osborn and Lawrence McIntosh (Melbourne: Academia, 1987), 184.

<sup>27</sup>See A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: Lectures on Doctrine* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1990), 61-64.

<sup>28</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165.

Luther was concerned with the Gospel and not Scripture.<sup>29</sup> Luther was concerned with both. It was in the Scripture that the believer found the Gospel. And it was the Gospel which gave the rule for what was canonical. There is no way for the contemporary reader to know the Gospel, save from the record of Scripture. Luther swam in the stream of authorial intent and exegesis—why else work so hard at getting to the original scabbard of language? To say that he was not concerned with Scripture is to impute purposes wholly different than his actions prove.

### **Misreading Evangelicalism**

Grenz' misreading of history continues as he treats the roots of evangelicalism. Grenz begins by affirming Calvin's explication of self-attestation of Scripture into an affirmation of the Pietists' existential hermeneutic. This misses the essential differences between the two perspectives. The Spirit inspires the objective text in time and space. The Spirit also confirms, or seals, the objective word on the conscience of the believer—individually and collectively. When he confirms the Word individually it relates to assurance that the Word is from God. When he confirms it corporately it pertains to canonization for the covenant community. Grenz takes one aspect of self-attestation (namely, the subjective and individual aspect) and posits it as the entire doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 58.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.; see also pp. 59-66. For a critique and different perspective see William G. Travis, "Pietism and the History of American Evangelicalism," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 251-79.

Sparked by their experience of the nurturing work of the Spirit through the Bible, evangelicals' overriding aim was to allow the message of the Bible to penetrate into human hearts and to encourage the devotional use of the Bible.<sup>31</sup>

He then writes off the evangelical concern for inerrancy as though it was only something that concerned nineteenth century theologians. From Augustine on through to the nineteenth century there was a great concern for the accuracy and inerrancy of the Scriptures.<sup>32</sup> As discussed in chapter two, post-conservatives have interpreted evangelicalism's history as an "attempt to find certainty for Christian faith in a world imbued with Cartesian skepticism, theologians followed the philosophers' lead and trotted after the pied piper of foundationalism."<sup>33</sup> Evangelicals are not united by indubitable theology, but by unshakeable piety. Grenz suggests the way forward in theological method: "If our theology is to speak the biblical message in our contemporary situation, we must shed the cloak of modernity and reclaim the more profound community outlook in which the biblical people of God were rooted."<sup>34</sup>

Grenz sharpens his dichotomy between the concern for spiritual vigor and pristine doctrine. He says, "[David Wells] erroneously claims that commitment to right doctrine is what gave birth to the evangelical movement. . . . The sine qua non of

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<sup>31</sup>Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 65.

<sup>32</sup>This is not a topic that this paper can sufficiently treat. It is necessary to see that this shift is inaccurate as it is painted by Grenz. See page 77 of his *Renewing the Center*, where it seems inerrancy was only a concern for a theology built upon incorrigible facts. Again, as early as Augustine, there was a concern for an error-free Bible so that God's people can be built up.

<sup>33</sup>Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 59. This is the chief assumption of post-conservatism regarding foundationalist theologians. Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 114.

<sup>34</sup>Grenz, *Revisioning*, 73; cf. 74.

evangelicalism from the beginning has not been doctrine but convertive piety.”<sup>35</sup> Wells does not affirm a Christ-versus-culture model as Grenz presumes. Rather, he provides fiber to the evangelical diet so that right thinking informs right experience. “The early Christians did not preach their *experience* of Christ. . . . Rather, they preached the Christ of that experience.”<sup>36</sup> The objective affected the subjective.

Along with this misreading of history is an inaccurate depiction of Evangelicalism’s relationship to Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>37</sup> Franke admits that his main concern is classic foundationalism.<sup>38</sup> However, both Grenz and Franke equate Grudem, Erickson, Warfield, and anyone else who follows their method as foundationalists (in the pejorative sense). Philosophically speaking, these men are not in the same stream as Descartes. This is a typical misfire by post-conservatives. An evangelical theology that begins where Descartes began should not be considered even Protestant. Descartes began with himself (*cogito ergo sum*), whereas Protestant theology begins with the text of Scripture. Sure there have been theologians (in premodern, modern, and postmodern) contexts that have taken Scripture out of its canonical context merely to proof-text their doctrine. This does not mean, however, that these exceptions should be considered the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 166. See also Stanley J. Grenz, “Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle,” in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 37, 39.

<sup>36</sup>David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 277-78.

<sup>37</sup>Stephen J. Wellum, “Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 186-87.

norm so that Grenz' strawman can be toppled over.<sup>39</sup> A brief survey of Grudem, Erickson, and Warfield will find that they affirmed tradition and culture as helps in interpretation.<sup>40</sup> The main difference, however, is that Scripture itself (albeit culturally-conditioned itself) stands over tradition and culture.

The Cartesian epistemic method most definitely has borrowed from historic Christian capital, but it must not be confused with evangelicalism.<sup>41</sup> The only way that Descartes could have turned to himself is by presupposing what he knew to be true from the Christian Scripture and natural revelation by God. As Carl F. H. Henry has observed about Descartes: "In its beginnings, modern philosophy was not intentionally naturalistic; it was, on the contrary, determinedly theistic or idealistic. As a devout Catholic Descartes had conceived his *Discourse on Method* as a bridge between modern and Christian

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<sup>38</sup>John R. Franke, "The Nature of Theology: Culture, Language, and Truth," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 210. See also Franke, "Christian Faith and Postmodern Theory," 109.

<sup>39</sup>More on this narrative scheme for doing theology will be offered in the third section below.

<sup>40</sup>To say that such theological methodologies are devoid of piety—opting for bald rationalism—is to misrepresent them. Grudem says that theology should be done with prayer, humility, help from others, rejoicing and praise. When he treats the topic of reason and proof-texting he says, "We are free to use our reasoning abilities to draw deductions from any passage of Scripture so long as these deductions do not contradict the clear teaching of some other passage of Scripture." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 34. Further he writes, "If we ultimately appeal to human reason, or to logic, or to historical accuracy, or to scientific truth, as the authority by which Scripture is shown to be God's words, then we have assumed the thing which we appealed to be a higher authority than God's words and one that is more true or more reliable." Ibid., 78. So also Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 70-84; Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 71-73; Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 12-17; Francis Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee III (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 39-55.

<sup>41</sup>See Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 1994), 16-23.

thought.”<sup>42</sup> What is tragic about the post-conservative scheme is that it has equivocated strong foundationalism with all foundationalism. It is fortunate that postmodernism has chastened strong foundationalism’s epistemic certainty; but it cannot do away with it altogether in its own scheme. Post-conservative’s misinterpretation is further highlighted by Jeffrey Jue, who shows that Protestant Scholasticism focused on the “method used to organize theological doctrines, and not as the content of the doctrines.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Abnormal Norming Norm**

Although they opt for a mosaic of belief rather than a foundational model for theology, post-conservatives cannot peel off the husk of foundationalism. That is, if they want to affirm Scripture as the norming norm for theology, they have already conceded to what can be called a foundation. If all interpretation and ethic has to be strained through the normative witness of Scripture, then they have already conceded what foundationalism has been affirming. While the metaphor of edifice may be exchanged for a web, the assumption of foundations cannot be abandoned. The post-conservative has merely changed nomenclature—“ultimate criteria” for “foundations.” This change has to

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<sup>42</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 1:37. While this is true of Descartes, he assumed too much by way of starting points. The contention of this dissertation is his presuppositions need elucidation. Rather, this quotation serves to show that Descartes was not a mere naturalist, Enlightenment philosopher, but operated out of a Christian worldview. Further, it is this Christian worldview that makes the Enlightenment possible. See also D. A. Carson, “Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?” in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191-93.

<sup>43</sup>Jeffrey K. Jue, “*Theologia Naturalis*: A Reformed Tradition,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 176.

take place because they deny that Scripture is self-attesting since they are “undercutting any notion of the Bible as being *inherently* authoritative.”<sup>44</sup>

Grenz and Franke are not confused—inarticulate, perhaps, but not confused. What exactly are they critiquing in popular Evangelicalism? Grenz and Franke want to do away with a universalizing principle located in the text of Scripture. They believe Scripture’s self-attesting authority is so linked with scientific *principia* and *prolegomena* they have equated it with philosophy rather than a doctrine grounded in Scripture itself. That is, if God has inspired a covenant document it speaks on its own authority. Protestant theology does not speak of Scripture’s authority devoid of the God who made it. This misreads the history of the doctrine and eschews a vital Protestant doctrine for fear of being spiritually sterile. This misread lies in their understanding of what Scripture is. A. A. Hodge corrects how evangelicals have historically understood inspiration:

The phrase “verbal inspiration” applies to the Scriptures does not mean that the sacred writers were inspired or directed in their work by words dictated or suggested. But it means that the divine influence which we call inspiration, and which accompanied them throughout their entire work, extended to the verbal expression of every thought as well as to the thoughts themselves. This inspiration has extended equally to every part of Scripture, matter and form, thought and words, and renders the whole and every part inerrant.”<sup>45</sup>

## **The Holy Cult(ure)**

Post-conservatives make two steps in their proposal for evangelical theological method. First, the theologian must understand that Scripture is culturally-bound. The

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<sup>44</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, “The Spirit and the Word: The World-Creating Function of the Text,” *TToday* 57 (2000): 358; idem, *Revisioning*, 88; idem, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1996), 168; Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 94.

<sup>45</sup>Hodge, *Evangelical Theology*, 79-80.

Bible did not land in the Middle East from above. Rather, God’s words were spoken over time in history. There is particularity to Scripture—ethnicity, historically, geographically. Borrowing from Lindbeck, they have affirmed that Scripture is merely “the paradigmatic interpretive framework that the community uses to understand the world and its identity.”<sup>46</sup>

Second, as a result of the first step, the community of faith becomes the arbiter for what Scripture is. Evangelicalism has always affirmed the first step, but given post-conservatives’ embrace of postmodern assumptions (i.e., particularity cannot produce universality), post-conservatives have to give preeminence to the community—no matter how much they verbally affirm Scripture as the norming norm. This particularity becomes evident in their denial of Scripture’s self-attestation; they fail to explicate the objective element of *autopistia* and replace the subjective element for Scripture’s objectivity.<sup>47</sup> Post-conservatives have taken one aspect of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture’s self-attestation—namely, the Spirit’s illumination in the believer’s heart to

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<sup>46</sup>Vanhooser, “Scripture and Tradition,” 161.

<sup>47</sup>The objective element answers the question, “Why just these books?” The subjective element is the illumination of the text in the believer’s heart giving him certainty that these books are God’s words. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), chap. 7. Due to space treatment of the history of reception and recognition of the canon as such is not possible. For further on this see James H. Charlesworth, “Writings Ostensibly outside the Canon,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 57-85; Stephen G. Dempster, “Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 87-127; Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002); F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible: An Historical and Exegetical Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957); idem, “Some Thoughts on the Beginning of the New Testament Canon,” in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 85-108; Brooke Foss Westcott, “On the Primitive Doctrine of Inspiration,” in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 2-45; James White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible’s Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2004), 95-119.

affirm that this is God’s word—and made this the rationale for what Scripture is.<sup>48</sup> Since Scripture is so embedded in ANE culture, in order for it to be useful for piety and inspiration, the church (i.e., community) must determine what is useful for life and doctrine. This is an adoption of the Roman Catholic method for understanding Scripture. This is hardly Evangelical, even if one uses norming norm lingo (all the while meaning something essentially different).<sup>49</sup>

Rome teaches that there were two sources of authority in the early church—oral tradition and the inscripturation of that tradition. The Scriptures are birthed from the oral tradition. This, in turn, means that the church came before the Scriptures.<sup>50</sup> post-conservatives may say that Scripture is the norming norm, but tradition truly molds

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<sup>48</sup>Note their treatment of 2 Tim 3:16 in chap. 2 of Grenz and Franke’s *Beyond Foundationalism*. That is, Scripture becomes God-breathed when the believer appropriates the text as God-inspired. This, again, shows their use of *a posteriori* argumentation for the doctrine of inspiration rather than the *a priori* element.

<sup>49</sup>All their talk sounds like more like a Roman Catholic theologian than an Evangelical. For an uncanny resemblance to post-conservatives’ theory of knowledge and the Bible see George H. Tavard, who argues strikingly similarly in “Tradition in Theology: A Methodological Approach,” in *Perspectives on Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Joseph F. Kelly (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1976), 105-25; idem, “Tradition in Theology: A Problematic Approach,” in *Perspectives on Scripture and Tradition*, ed. Joseph F. Kelly (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1976), 84-104.

<sup>50</sup>For a current scholarly defense of this theory see Jacques Guillet, “The Role of the Bible in the Birth of the Church,” in *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, ed. and trans. Paul M. Blowers (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), 34-48. Compare Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 144. While the Roman Catholic Church’s position a la Trent and Vatican I are more nuanced, Vatican II makes clear that there are two sources of authority flowing from the same fountain. The issue at hand is whether tradition carries a weight of authority equal to that of Scripture. Issues like veneration of the saints and the assumption of Mary would fall under this as they are accepted as canon law since they do not *contradict* Scripture. But the question remains: Should a tradition that is not taught in Scripture be adhered to with the same reverence and devotion as that taught in Scripture? For a helpful survey of Roman Catholic primary literature see Benedict Thomas Viviano, “The Normativity of Scripture and Tradition in Recent Catholic Theology,” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 125-40. At the end of the day, post-conservatives have adopted this view.

Scripture to be whatever it wants it to be.<sup>51</sup> Vanhoozer offers a corrective to this line of thought:

The church acknowledges what the Bible is—divine discourse—but this acknowledgement does not make it so. The inspiration of Scripture in the past and the illumination of Scripture in the present are but twin moments of one continuous work of the Holy Spirit who, in the triune communicative economy, presents the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. *A properly theological account of Scripture begins from the premise that God is a communicative agent, able to use language for communicative purposes.*<sup>52</sup>

Grenz and Franke seem to adopt a model of tradition and Scripture similar to that expressed by Guillet:

Without wishing to deny that many of the words and gospel stories originate with Jesus, [the *Formgeschichte* school] argue[s] that these traditions, in order to be communicated and transmitted, must have taken a certain form. They must have been poured into models which rendered them suitable for use and repetition. Furthermore, these models, isolated sentences or groups of sentences, anecdotes couching a word, miracle stories, controversies, prayers, and so on, were products of the community, born of the community's needs and diverse activities. They were an anonymous creation which truly took shape only when the community adopted them and held on to them.<sup>53</sup>

Because of this, post-conservatives also sound more similar to the Orthodox Church than the Evangelical camp.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals," 162, 191-92.

<sup>52</sup>Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 165; emphasis added. Vanhoozer helpfully adds in a footnote that this comes under the doctrine of providence.

<sup>53</sup>Guillet, "The Role of the Bible," 38. For clarity, Guillet is not adopting this school of thought but merely describing it. And to be fair, Grenz and Franke do not adopt the *Formgeschichte* school wholesale for they do say that the writers of Scripture were able to recall history more accurately than the *Formgeschichte* school allows (see *ibid.*, 43).

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Thomas Hopko, "The Church, the Bible, and Dogmatic Theology," in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 108. He says, "The church is the locus of God's full, perfect, and definitive self-revelation in history, the locus of God's most complete and compelling interaction with human beings."

The issue at hand is whether Scripture is the only norming norm and whether it possesses preeminent authority. Donald Bloesch similarly goes awry when he equivocates history experienced by the authors of Scripture and oral tradition handed down.<sup>55</sup> Scripture, then, is consequential and not essential to Christianity. Carson writes,

What is at issue is a worldview clash of fundamental importance. If you buy into a postmodern worldview, then even if there is an omniscient talking God, you cannot possibly know it in an objective sense. But the talking God of the Bible not only communicates, but establishes a quite different metanarrative. . . . This metanarrative is given in words; it explains and controls the interpretation of other narratives. To claim this is “totalization” and therefore to be rejected as oppressive exploitation is a useful category only if the metanarrative is untrue; if in fact it is true, to accuse it of totalization is nothing other than the resurfacing of human hubris, the shaking of one’s puny fist in the face of God, the apex of sinful rebellion.<sup>56</sup>

Since God has created all men and the entire cosmos belongs to him, he has every right and prerogative to direct and affect his world as he wishes. In fact, the only way to move from particularities to universals is via that which is transcendent (and immanent). The only way Christianity can adjudicate from an ANE culture and contemporary culture is by a self-attesting word from God. A methodology that does not begin with God’s own words about himself and his interpretation of history and phenomena is not a methodology worthy of being called Christian. All statements about God are only

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<sup>55</sup>He uses John 20:30 and 21:25 to support this notion. The problem is that simply because John affirms that Jesus did many more things, this does not mean ipso facto that an oral tradition has been handed down that the church possesses. Bloesch admits this much when he says, “We can presume that an oral tradition emerged from apostolic times;” Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 142. As John saw with his own eyes what Jesus had done—this presence during Christ’s ministry is integrally tied to what was recognized as the church as authoritative on her practice. Kevin J. Vanhoozer has said regarding the canonical witness as given by the apostolic discourse, the canon is “something someone says in some way to someone about something *that one saw for oneself or was told by someone else* (not least, the Holy Spirit).” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Apostolic Discourse and Its Developments,” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 197.

<sup>56</sup>Carson, “Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?” 191-92.

possible if God first speaks. All calls for obedience to the Triune God must be grounded first in his call to all men.

What is at stake is a revision of Scripture, historically understood. If the Christian community arbitrates what is and is not Scripture (imbuing authority to the texts) the canon is a fluid document. Post-conservatives must “amen” Burton Throckmorton Jr.’s statement, “The Scripture is the church’s book. It was written by the church [and] for the church. There’s no reason . . . that I can see why the church can’t add to its Scripture—delete from its Scripture. I think the church can do with its Scripture what it wants to [do] with its Scripture.”<sup>57</sup> This is precisely what happens when essential doctrines are liable to change (even the most explicit ones) as the culture and cult change.

At heart in Scripture’s self-attestation debate is the canon’s relationship to the church. How one understands the canon’s birth will directly affect one’s ecclesiology.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Community and Its Canon**

If the church is the cradle out of which the Scripture has been born, then this leads to a prickly problem for the evangelical. What texts are the Christian to come under

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<sup>57</sup>Burton Throckmorton, Jr., as quoted in “NCC’s Bi-Sexual Lectionary Brings More Problems,” *Christianity Today*, 16 December 1983, 40.

<sup>58</sup>Additionally, one’s view of God’s inspiration of Scripture and God’s relationship to the world will, undoubtedly, also affect one’s ecclesiology and view of the canon. Although misguided and misrepresenting much of Protestant scholarship, Craig D. Allert is right to see such a clear connection. See chapter three (“Canon and Ecclesiology”) in his book *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 67-86. While much of what Allert says may be true for inarticulate evangelicals, he paints with very broad strokes the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*—as though it negated the need for tradition. It is unfortunate that so-called evangelical scholars have critiqued a straw man in order to press an agenda of re-incorporating the church in the interpretation and appropriation of Scripture. Garwood Anderson, review of *A High View of Scripture: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon*, by Craig D. Allert, [SBL]; accessed on 11 November 2009; available from [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6258\\_6733.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6258_6733.pdf); Internet.

as canon? That is, since the Roman Catholic Church founded the canon at the Council of Carthage in 397, affirming the Apocrypha, is this the canon that is authoritative?<sup>59</sup> After all, this is also part of the Protestant tradition.

Further, much ambiguity surrounds post-conservatives who give a primacy to the church as the mother of Scripture. Which church are the post-conservatives referring to—Rome or Geneva? Canon and church do go hand in hand, but not in the direction they would have us believe. As Achtemeier says, “Much of what we have in Scripture is the written sedimentation of the historic experiences of that community, and the resulting understanding of itself and its meaning within God’s plan.”<sup>60</sup> Scripture is what the church has deemed necessary for its faith and practice. Again, he says,

If it is true, therefore, that the church, by its production of Scripture, created materials which stood over it in judgment and admonition, it is also true that Scripture would not have existed save for the community and its faith out of which Scripture grew. That means that church and Scripture are joint effects of the working out of the event of Christ. The close tie between community and Scripture has a most important consequence for our thinking about the inspiration of that Scripture. It is this: if Scripture is to be understood as inspired, then inspiration will have to be understood equally in terms of the community that produced those Scriptures. Inspiration, in short, occurs within the community of faith, and must be located at least as much within that community as it is with an individual author.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Such uncertainty pervades Allert’s work as he points fingers to evangelicals for not valuing the role of the church in canonization. He looks to the Church Fathers (albeit selectively and out of context many times) to buttress his argument that his hearers need to affirm the church’s interpretation and role more readily.

<sup>60</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 115. See also James A. Sanders, *Canon as Paradigm: From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

<sup>61</sup>Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 116. Achtemeier finds inspiration tied to Scripture’s own claim to itself (106-14), but the intention and weight of Scripture’s inspiration is dictated by the community. In other words, tradition, situation, and respondent ground inspiration, not God’s self-communication (124-34). Consequently, it is these three components that he says is the locus of Scripture’s inspiration (134). For Achtemeier, God may be the “principal efficient cause,” but this proves to be nothing more than a Deist conception of God’s activity in the world (25). For a realignment of Achtemeier’s proposal to a more conservative view see Grant Osbourne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 5-10.

A hermeneutical problem persists when Scripture's meaning and ground are located in the interpretive community. An infinite progression ensues, as well as cultural con-formation, so that actual meaning is unable to be grasped. As Hauerwas says (citing Stanley Fish), "There simply is no 'real meaning' of Paul's letters to the Corinthians once we understand that they are no longer Paul's letters but rather the Church's scripture."<sup>62</sup>

Hauerwas goes on to say that while many would be uncomfortable with such a subjective view of interpretation, hope is found in the community of faith. "Scripture can be rightly interpreted only within the practices of a body of people constituted by the unity found in the Eucharist."<sup>63</sup> Following this argument, the believer is left with a corporate subjectivism as his foundation/ultimate criterion for belief.

Returning to Grenz' talk of the Spirit being present wherever life flourishes, the believer has to affirm that Scripture is the foundation/ultimate criterion that adjudicates what is good and evil in the culture. Or he has to affirm a dual aspect to revelation by the Spirit. That is, he speaks through the culture and the Scripture. This, however, begs the question. How does one know which voice to listen to if the two messages contradict? He must be left with either contradictory messages or a foundation on which to build (or a center on which to bind) his beliefs. If he is fine with the contradiction given his prior commitment to nonfoundationalism, then one is hard-

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<sup>62</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 20.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 23; this is the representative Roman Catholic view as evidenced in its Dogmatic Constitution. Hauerwas cites it approvingly as middle ground as pertains to biblical interpretation. See also George T. Ladd, *What Is the Bible: An Inquiry into the Origin and Nature of the Old and New Testaments in the Light of Modern Biblical Study* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 363-64.

pressed to find help for the Christian who is trying to walk on the narrow road after Christ—for two paths are going in opposite directions.<sup>64</sup>

A third issue among nonfoundationalism as pertains to the holy cult(ure) has to do with its echoing much of what the history of religions school affirmed—particularly James Barr. The issue resides in Barr’s presupposition that it is tradition that determines and interprets and authorizes canon.<sup>65</sup> In order to not lose the importance of the canon entirely, Barr leans on the broad understanding of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit as lending authority to the texts—a kind of hyper-immanence. Put another way, “The way this faith in God is related to its object is not by means of a revelational construct, but rather in terms of a model based on the idea of presence. The Holy Spirit accompanies the people of God in their history.”<sup>66</sup> It is a failure to understand the Protestant insistence upon *sola Scriptura* that has led to this state of affairs. Timothy Ward argues forcefully for a better understanding that is tied to God’s commands.<sup>67</sup>

The traditional view of the Bible’s authority is tied to infallibility and inerrancy, but it is surely more than this. The Bible’s authority is linked to an inherent quality that results from it being God’s very words. Once the divine author is removed and once double agency is pared to the human author, then authority has to reside

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<sup>64</sup>See Paul Helm, “No Easy Task: John R. Franke and the Character of Theology,” in *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 99.

<sup>65</sup>Paul Ronald Wells, *James Barr and the Bible: Critique of a New Liberalism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 283.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>67</sup>Timothy Ward, *Words of Life : Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 74-79.

somewhere else. Barr's view can be summarized as: God → people → tradition → scripture.<sup>68</sup>

In reply to Barr, one could apply Oliver O'Donovan's words (speaking of the moral authority of Scripture): "Holy Scripture is part of God's own self-attestation in deed and word. It is not a secondary reflection on it, which, had it not occurred, would have left God's message about himself intact. In speaking of Scripture, then, we properly speak of the voice of God as well as of the voice of its human authors."<sup>69</sup> God breaks into human history through his Prophets and apostles in order to speak a normative word through the culture indicting that very culture.

Clark Pinnock is cited by post-conservatives to support their theology of Holy Writ, where community takes priority over the text.<sup>70</sup> The community essentially authors the text as they are inspired by God.<sup>71</sup> This leads him to conclude: "A process of Scripture collection and formation is in motion from the very beginnings of Israel's existence that proves that the later Scripture principle is not a late distortion or misdevelopment but a predictable result of the momentum of her faith. . . . The Scripture principle is inherent in the faith of Israel."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 60. Note this has reversed the historic order.

<sup>69</sup>Oliver O'Donovan, "The Moral Authority of Scripture," in *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 167.

<sup>70</sup>Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 32.

<sup>71</sup>Stanley J. Grenz' method is easily seen in his essay "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 70-92.

<sup>72</sup>Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, 34-35.

Not only is the Scripture principle (as re-imagined by Pinnock) inherent in the faith community, but the tradition is the hermeneutic under whose authority the Scripture speaks. “A nonfoundationalist conception of tradition views the tradition of the church above all as the hermeneutical trajectory in the context of which the theological task of the community is pursued.”<sup>73</sup> In this way, then, the community has become the norming norm. For the Scripture can only speak that which the tradition allows it to say—a corporate reader response theory.

Post-conservatives claim that they are not lead into subjectivism. Franke writes,

A theology of Word and Spirit need not lapse into subjectivism, however. What leads to subjectivism is the articulation of such a theology in the context of a basically individualistic understanding of the event of revelation. In other words, the problem of subjectivism arises only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community.<sup>74</sup>

But which community wins out when the dialogue centered on ultimate criteria is at a stand still? Surely, there are doctrines that are fundamental to the Christian faith. These questions are not answered. It appears that Franke’s new book on the plurality of truth also suffers from such lack of precision so that the subjective experience is equivocated with the objective truth.<sup>75</sup> This is where the post-conservative’s road must lead since all truth is locale’s truth.

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<sup>73</sup>Franke, “Scripture,” 206.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>75</sup>See Douglas Wilson’s two-part critique “The Plurality of Truth Moonwalk,” [*Blog & Mablog*]; accessed on 14 July 2011; available from <http://www.dougwils.com/Postmodernism/The-Plurality-of-Truth-Moonwalk.html>; Internet; and “In the Mouths of Theological Blowhards,” [*Blog & Mablog*]; accessed on 14 July 2011; available from <http://www.dougwils.com/Postmodernism/In-the-Mouths-of-Theological-Blowhards.html>; Internet.

This failure to get past the situatedness of human language leads to a final critique of the post-conservative proposal. The proposed way forward is not able to move from the “is” of observation to the “ought” of ethics. “Theology concerns the quest for justifiable particularity. For some, this suggestion will seem arrogant and imperialist. . . . To be different is not to be superior; it is just to be different.”<sup>76</sup> McGrath critiques liberalism that sought to flatten differences out between world religions, but one cannot help come away from Grenz and Franke thinking the same thing. Sure, they deny the foundationalism inherent in the liberal program, but at the end of the day, with their affirmation of plurality since communities are so bound up in their culture, communities are not able to tell other communities they are wrong or they ought to change their viewpoint. Dialogue will continue *ad nauseum* if there is no truth to know here and now. Of course people see in part and will only know fully when they see Christ face to face, but God’s entrusted word (as presented in Scripture) is the authoritative word by which all are and will be judged. Otherwise people will be “always learning and never being able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7).

### **Reorienting (Reformed) Epistemology**

Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and William Alston have sought to explain how people know what they know based upon Reformation principles of anthropology and epistemology. One of the primary contributions of RE is its justification of Christian belief based upon the Christian believer’s confidence in

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<sup>76</sup>Alistair E. McGrath, “Reclaiming Our Roots and Vision: Scripture and the Stability of the Christian Church,” in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 82.

Scripture as properly basic. When discussing RE and *autopistia*, however, the differentiation between the objective (i.e., historical) and the subjective (i.e., fiduciary commitment) must be clearly distinguished.<sup>77</sup> That is, the reason for *trusting* the testimony set forth by the Scripture is dependent upon an internal commitment related to, but distinct, from the reason the testimonies are true. This has to do with the nature of the information imparted in Scripture—that is, it is primarily moral and not merely a presentation of the world.<sup>78</sup> It is a presentation of what the world means—an interpretation of the facts of history.

If the Spirit merely uses the text, as produced by human authors (i.e., analogy of a secretary taking notes and having the boss sign off on the document), then in what way can the Christian honestly say that God inspired and produced the text of Scripture? Where does divine agency actually take place in such a scheme? Apparently Wolterstorff is left with the same problem as post-conservatives. That is, The Holy Wars of the OT were not authorized by God, but were fallible human judgments as to what God's will was. How does one determine what text, what narrative, to trust for faith and practice? The interpreter is left to divine the divine intention. The fact is that all Christians have is a text to be able to adjudicate right from wrong, albeit a text that the one who inspired its writing inspires its application.

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<sup>77</sup>So Thomas M. Crisp, "On Believing That the Scriptures Are Divinely Inspired," in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 204.

<sup>78</sup>So also James N. Anderson, "Presuppositionalism and Frame's Epistemology," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 454.

One of the difficulties present in RE is its emphasis on the community as the arbiter for what is canon for the believer.<sup>79</sup> When asked about one's foundation, RE claims that people know and do not have to give justification for the belief.<sup>80</sup> Yet if pressed to give a reason why people should believe the Bible, it is due to the community of faith giving it to the believer. In this way, then, the community becomes the rationale for accepting the canon of Scripture.<sup>81</sup> This is birthed from RE's failure to affirm the objective aspect of Scripture's self-witness.<sup>82</sup> They have done a fine work in showing the internal testimony of the Spirit in the life of the believer as grounds for accepting the testimony of the Bible.

To merely affirm the internal testimony of the Spirit as warrant for belief merely leads RE to affirm a collective subjectivity to get around the problem of utter subjectivity. This is hardly a satisfying response. In this way, Christian cults and fanatics can claim equal validity to their further revelations from the Spirit insofar that their community affirms a contemporary prophet. This is why the scriptural paradigm of God's appointment of individuals to record his words for the covenant is key to ridding oneself

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<sup>79</sup>This emphasis subsequently leads post-conservatives to see RE as defining the church as basic in theology. While they have clearly said that God is basic to human knowledge, when it comes to justification, they have to point to the community of faith as theology's foundation. See Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 232.

<sup>80</sup>Alvin C. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 112; idem, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1967), 268, 271; idem, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 193.

<sup>81</sup>Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 89-91; idem, "On Taking Belief in God as Basic," in *Religious Experience and Religious Belief: Essays in the Epistemology of Religion*, ed. Joseph Runzo and Craig K. Ihara (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1986), 16; C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 16-35.

from objectivism. It is the historical rootedness in YHWH and Jesus' appointment of prophets and apostles to speak in their stead that gives ground for true belief. In this way, *sola Scriptura* is maintained in that the believer does not depend on the testimony of the collective witness of the community, but upon the divine economy of revelation.<sup>83</sup>

It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit that warrants the fiduciary commitment of the believer to hold to Scripture's own testimony of the facts of history. The evidence as to the reliability of the historical accounts is needed to verify the witnesses to the resurrection; the evidence, however, cannot convince. As Dowey Jr., has aptly said,

The Bible has intrinsic validity. But this does not constitute its authority or even one source of its authority. The authority derives solely from the inner witness of God himself through which the intrinsic validity or inherent truth of the sacred oracles is recognized and confirmed. . . . Clearly the internal testimony is witness to the truth of the external word. . . . The objective revelation is there, or "out there" in Scripture, which is *αυτοπιστον*, self-authenticating. But it is "self" authenticating only to those who have been empowered by the Spirit to perceive this authentication.<sup>84</sup>

It is the same Spirit who brought to remembrance that which was necessary for salvation (subsequently inscripturated) who also endowed the authors with authority who also speaks through the pages of Scripture to produce faith in the reader that he must submit his belief system to a "higher, transcendental kind of knowing."<sup>85</sup> He is

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<sup>82</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 258-66.

<sup>83</sup>See also D. A. Carson, "Approaching the Bible," in *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 34-35.

<sup>84</sup>Isaak August Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie* (Munich: Gotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1867), 380, quoted in Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 108.

<sup>85</sup>Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 110. See also F. F. Bruce, "Scripture in Relation to Tradition and Reason," in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian*

“rationally convinced, yet the conviction rises far above what can be rationally grasped.”<sup>86</sup>

Thus, when RE speaks about the convincing nature of the Spirit’s present work through the pages of Scripture it does not submit to a fideistic notion that conviction is grounded in a mere subjective convincing. The economy of the Spirit of God is found in the past—where the apostles were inspired by him—and in the present—where he moves men to accept the testimonies as true.<sup>87</sup> The warrant for belief are “generally available for presentation” within the context of the community—as it reflects the dictums of Scripture.<sup>88</sup> More than anything, RE has served the church by showing that belief in God is basic.<sup>89</sup> It does not *prove* the existence of God, let alone the necessity of believing in the Triune God. That is not its purpose; belief in God is not antithetical to reason. Naturalism’s epistemology depends on a supernaturalistic metaphysic. “Naturalistic epistemology conjoined with naturalistic metaphysics leads *via* evolution to skepticism or to violation of canons of rationality; conjoined with theism it does not.”<sup>90</sup> In other words, naturalism has no warrant in and of itself to hold to rationality. Naturalism needs that

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*Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Richard P.C. Hanson*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 39.

<sup>86</sup>Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 110.

<sup>87</sup>On this, the work of Michael Polanyi has proven helpful. All knowing is what he terms “tacit knowing.” It is “an act of *indwelling* by which we gain access to a new meaning. When exercising a skill we literally dwell in the innumerable muscular acts which contribute to its purpose, a purpose which constitutes their joint meeting. Therefore, since all understanding is tacit knowing, all understanding is achieved by indwelling.” Michael Polanyi, “Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy,” in *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 160.

<sup>88</sup>See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); esp. 187.

<sup>89</sup>Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 112.

which is other to bring order to its chaotic means. “So the evidentialist is right: where there is warrant, there is evidence. Having this evidence, however, or having this evidence and forming belief on the basis of it, is not sufficient for warrant: proper function is also required.”<sup>91</sup>

Scripture teaches that herein lays the ultimate problem: humans’ epistemic, faith-producing centers do not function properly. Due to the Fall, man is incapable of seeing the world as it is. The eyes of his mind have been corrupted so much so that he cannot understand the oughts of his creaturely status. What is needed to correct man’s myopia is a new set of eyes—provided by the Holy Spirit.

Three rebuttals may come at this point: (1) If such a work of the Spirit is a transcendental kind of knowing, why is there a need for evidences; (2) The warrant for *autopistia* lays primarily in the subject, which any religion could claim for why they believe what they do; (3) The argument is circular. These will be taken in turn.

### **Evidentiary Faith**

As pertains to the first rebuttal, many adhere to Romanticism’s definition of faith so that evidences are contrary to faith. This has been due, in large measure, to a failure to understand biblical faith. That is, many have believed that since the ephemeral world is inaccessible to the senses you must make a leap over Lessing’s Ditch to believe that these particulars in history have implications for all humankind. While it is true that

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<sup>90</sup>Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 193.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

the Divine is separate from and inaccessible to the creature, it does not follow that the two cannot interact.

The Creator, as presented in Scripture, stooped into his Creation to form man from the dust. He spoke to him in a language the finite man could understand. He gave him commands he intended him to keep. He came in judgment and interpreted the man's sin against the Creator. The story continues to evidence God's activity among the Patriarchs, through his immediate acts in the Exodus, his interpretation of those acts through an intermediary. These stories are not men's mere interpretations about events. These authors are the authorized interpreters of the events. Their perspective is God's perspective; God's perspective is their perspective. Human language is not a barrier to understanding events truly. It is the means by which men may know the events at all. As was shown in the OT, God indicts the people for not obeying Moses mandates because he expected them to obey him. Moses was the particular, finite representative for YHWH on earth. What he communicated to Israel was all that the Lord had commanded him—with his voice, his grammar, even his vocabulary. He communicated true things in a cultural context. The culture did not hinder him from speaking true things. Rather, the framework in which he spoke enabled him to be verified as sane, authoritative, and trustworthy.

When the early church was deciding what books to accept into the canon it based its decisions upon evidences that these men had been with Jesus. If they were bonafide apostles, they must be heeded because they provide access to the historical Jesus and they were commissioned by Jesus to speak for him. The assumption of these verifying tests was that God the Son had become incarnate and appropriated the persons and words of these particular men. He is able to truly communicate through these

representatives. Of course, all of these evidences are only worth their salt if God can truly communicate with his creatures—not by impressions, but with words. “A properly theological account of Scripture begins from the premise that God is a communicative agent, able to use language for communicative purposes.”<sup>92</sup>

In Owen’s *Greater Catechism*, he answers Question #4 (“How know you them to be the word of God?”) by saying: “By the testimony of God’s Spirit, working faith in my heart to close with that heavenly majesty and clear divine truth, that shineth in them.”<sup>93</sup> Note carefully, how does the believer *know* that Scripture is the word of God?

This reflects a fiduciary commitment because he footnotes the answer by saying:

his [the testimony of God’s Spirit] persuadeth and inwardly convinceth the heart of the divine verity of the Scripture; *other motives, also, there are from without*, and unanswerable arguments to prove the truth of them; as,—1. Their antiquity; 2. Preservation from fury; 3. Prophecies in them; 4. The holiness and majesty of their doctrine, agreeable to the nature of God; 5. Miracles; 6. The testimony of the church of all ages; 7. The blood of innumerable martyrs, &c.<sup>94</sup>

There is purpose in evidences. These, however, serve the believer’s surety. They cannot fully persuade nor can they convert a man, only the Spirit of God can fully convince him that what Scripture says is true. The evidences are foolishness to the mind which is a slave to the flesh. Indeed, they are the stench of death to those who have not been quickened by the Spirit of God (see 1 Cor 1:18-2:16).

The relationship between the objective evidences and the convincing nature of the *testimonium* is pivotal when reading Owen as he discusses the evidences in *On the*

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<sup>92</sup>Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 165.

<sup>93</sup>John Owen, *The Greater Catechism* in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 470.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 470n7; emphasis added.

*Divine Original*. Owen spends the last chapter (VI) giving evidences (what he terms “mean grounds”) to the Scriptures because “there may be great use, at several seasons, of some consequential considerations and arguments to the purpose in hand.”<sup>95</sup> But this is only after he insists that the self-attesting character of the Scripture’s to its own authority is “that which is better.” He writes,

Although a man be furnished with external arguments of all sorts concerning the divine original and authority of the Scriptures, although he esteem his motives of credibility to be effectually persuasive, and have the authority of any or all the churches in himself of its divine power, authority, and efficacy, he neither doth nor can believe it to be the word of God in a due manner,—with faith divine and supernatural. But he that hath this experience hath that testimony in himself which will never fail.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, evidences may be mounted that refute every argument against receiving Scripture as true, but they would never cause the interlocutor to embrace them as true for him. The Spirit of God must convince the listener that Scripture is God’s Word. How is the hearer to get the content of salvation? By reading the Scriptures. Given the relationship between the Word and Spirit spoken of above, the Spirit will use his written word to convince.

Faith and reason are dependent upon each other.<sup>97</sup> Inferentially, epistemology is dependent upon evidences. Typical renditions of *autopistia* place an emphasis on one

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<sup>95</sup>John Owen, *On the Divine Originals of Scripture* of *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 337. Compare idem, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit—Continued: The Reason of Faith* of *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 71, where he says, “They have all of them their use, and may in their proper place be insisted upon.” Yet he still concludes: “Their use is not great.” Ibid., 337.

<sup>96</sup>Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, 94.

<sup>97</sup>So Ramm’s helpful explanation of reason as the means to get to the ground of faith: “It is urged that if a Christian chooses the Bible as his authority on the grounds of reason, then reason and not Scripture is his real authority. The grounds for accepting an authority, and the right of the authority are two different matters. Reason, or intuition, or an inclination are *modes* of perceiving and receiving an authority,

aspect of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*—namely, the subjective. It is the argument of this dissertation that theologians must bring the historical grounding of the *testimonium* (what is here called “evidences”) back to the discussion. The value of which will become more apparent in the apologetic section of this chapter. To lay emphasis on the subjective aspect is to succumb to romanticism and an inability to engage in meaningful discourse with those from other faith commitments. It unnecessarily bifurcates faith and reason. If God truly made the world, and man truly sinned against him, and God exacted judgment upon all men, and man is unable to meet the requirements of this justice, and God has provided a way for man to be redeemed through his historical condescension, then such objective happenings have recourse for all mankind. The assumption of the Scripture is that because YHWH is the Creator of *all* men, the worldview it gives has implications for *all* men.<sup>98</sup>

Post-conservatives have opted to eschew truth for coherence and pragmatism.

Grenz writes,

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but they do not constitute the right of the authority received. . . . If the living God has spoken, His word of revelation is the authority in religion. If this word of revelation is made permanent through writing, then the written revelation is our authority in religion. A man accepts this written revelation as his authority in religion by personal appropriation. But whatever the subjective ground for receiving this revelation might be, it neither constitutes nor compromises the authority of the divine revelation.” Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority*, 41.

<sup>98</sup>This inevitably leads to hermeneutical discussions of how the OT relates to the NT. That is, how does the particularity of the OT economy of salvation displayed in the cultus of Israel relate to Jews and Gentiles? The answer lay in typology. All three aspects of the Mosaic Law have entailments for all mankind. This is true, not in the theonomist hermeneutic, but through a fulfillment hermeneutic. That is, as Jesus said he did not come to abrogate the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them, it is the case that his life, death, and resurrection were the goal of the entire OT economy—prophet, priest, and king. Conversely, the OT economy should not be read merely through a cultural lens. In other words, the laws and stipulations in Leviticus should not be eschewed because it was written to a particular congregation but because Messiah filled the intentions of those laws. The Temple pointed toward the presence of YHWH—fulfilled in the Incarnation. The sacrificial system pointed to a perfect, complete sacrifice—since the writers of Scripture knew that the blood of bulls and goats would not atone for the sins of a man. It required a man to be a substitute for a man. The rampant apostasy of the kings (subsequently the people) was answered by the fidelity of forever Son of David.

Coherentism and pragmatism provided ways to leave behind the foundationalist preference for the correspondence theory of truth. The means to overcome metaphysical realism, however, came from another source: the “turn to linguistics,” especially as it is found in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in a sense completed the shift toward belief systems and the communal dimension of truth pioneered by the coherentists and the pragmatists.<sup>99</sup>

One fails to see how this is more epistemically satisfying. The question of truth cannot be relegated to unimportance—as if pursuit of truth is the wrong venture. In an effort to explain how Christianity is preferable to other religions, post-conservatives have answered a secondary question. That is, coherent beliefs must still be true beliefs insofar that they give a rational explanation of human experience. Whether a worldview is coherent or not seeks to answer the broader question of whether the worldview is true or not.

### *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*

This leads to a discussion of the second rebuttal: *autopistia* lays primarily in the subject. The answer begins with an anthropological discussion. Scripture portrays man as being blind by the god of this world (the Satan) and by his volitional idolatry. He exchanges the worship of God for the finite. While the glory of God is clearly etched in the firmament, man denies his existence. The knowledge of God (as stated before) is not

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<sup>99</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, “Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 115-16. Grenz believes this is an epistemically-satisfying way forward when he writes, “Pannenberg seeks to devise a third way between Protestant scholasticism, which he accuses of unwittingly placing the Bible in contradiction to every new discovery of truth rather than integrating scientific discoveries into the truth claim of the Christian faith and ‘neo-Protestantism’ (e.g., pietism and liberalism), which in his estimation leads to a potentially irrational, subjectivist understanding of truth. According to Pannenberg, rather than being merely subjective, truth is universal, for any valid ‘personal truth’ must be, at least in principle, true for all.” *Ibid.*, 117. In this way, then, coherence takes priority over truth. Again, “Because God is the ground of truth, as Wolfhart Pannenberg so consistently argues, all truth ultimately comes together in God. Theology therefore looks to all human knowledge, for in so doing it demonstrates the unity of truth in God.” *Ibid.*, 127-28.

purely objective—like whether someone is sitting in a chair or not—it is wholly moral.<sup>100</sup> Since the knowledge of God<sup>101</sup> is not merely objective, the need for subjective persuasion becomes apparent. In this way, the self-authenticating character of Scripture is objectively true, but will also include its convincing character. This is why Owen could speak so strongly about the primacy of the convincing nature of the *testimonium*. As Niebuhr has said, “We *acknowledge* revelation by no third person proposition, such as that there is a God, but only in the direct confession of the heart. . . . Revelation as the self-disclosure of the infinite person is *realized in us only through the faith which is a personal act of commitment, of confidence and trust*, not a belief about the nature of things.”<sup>102</sup> Evidences have an *a posteriori* (read confirmatory) function, but they are unable to convince. They do not ground the authority of Scripture. Scripture’s authority is grounded in the Spirit of God, who is known from the Scripture itself.

While Karl Barth affirmed the self-witness of Scripture, he subsumed the objectivity of inspiration of Scripture under the subjectivity of illumination in the hearts of believers. As Murray poignantly summarizes,

On Barthian presuppositions, it is not the divine quality inherent in Scripture nor the divine activity by which that quality has been imparted to it that makes Scripture authoritative. That past activity [of inspiration] and the resultant quality may

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<sup>100</sup>See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957); Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 294-309; Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Faith and Philosophy,” in *Faith and Philosophy: Philosophical Studies in Religion and Ethics*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 22-29; idem, “Obligation, Entitlement, and Rationality,” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 326-38.

<sup>101</sup>This is not only an objective genitive, but also more general so that it includes the knowledge God imparts—found in Scripture.

<sup>102</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 153-54; emphasis added. While I would disagree with where Niebuhr ends with his premise (he moves in the direction of romanticism), I believe the strength of what he says is still true.

constitute the prerequisites for the authority by which it becomes ever and anon invested, but they do not constitute that authority. It is rather the ever-recurring act of God that is the authority-constituting fact. This ever-recurring activity of God may be conceived of as the internal testimony of the Spirit and so it is this testimony that constitutes Scripture authoritative.<sup>103</sup>

This, as Murray notes, should not be considered the historic Protestant conception of Scripture's self-witness. Citing the *WCF*, Murray asserts "Scripture is authoritative because God is its author and he is its author because, as is stated in Section II, it was given by inspiration of God."<sup>104</sup> The internal testimony of the Spirit does not give Scripture its authority as God's Word (as though it becomes God's Word). Rather, the internal witness of the Spirit gives assurance to the believer that the objective word is truly God's Word. Put another way, the internal witness of the Spirit actualizes the already present authority of Scripture.<sup>105</sup>

Augustine, Calvin, and Owen are helpful in showing how the subjective aspect of the *testimonium* relates to the objective aspect of inspiration. Both Calvin and Owen sought to navigate between the authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church and the fanaticism of the utterly subjective (the Anabaptists and the Quakers, respectively); whereas Augustine replied to the historical disconnect of the Manichaeans. In reply to the fanatics all three men pointed to the work of the Spirit as confirmatory through the church. Some read the Scripture and believe they have gained insight that contradicts the orthodox faith claims of the church. Augustine pointed to the apostolic rootedness of the

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<sup>103</sup>John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 44.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-47.

church—calling Faustus to verify his self-claimed authority by linking himself to the verifiability of the Scripture, not merely by his words. Calvin “sets the public discernment of the church” over against the misinterpretations of 1 John 4:1.<sup>106</sup> Owen similarly replies by appealing to the necessity of external verification to the veracity of truth claims. It is worthy to be quoted at length:

Is the reason hereof, because I live among those who have this tradition, and they are my neighbours whom I know? By the same rule those who live among the other parts of men are bound to receive what they deliver them upon tradition; and so men may be obliged to believe the Koran to be the word of God. It is more probably, it will be answered, that their testimony is to be received because they are the church of God. But it doth not yet appear that I can any other way have the knowledge of them so to be, or of any authority that any number of men (more or less) can have in this case, under that name or notion, unless by the Scripture itself. And if so, it will quickly appear what place is to be allotted to their testimony, who cannot be admitted as witnesses unless the Scripture itself be owned and received; because they have neither plea nor claim to be so admitted but only from Scripture.<sup>107</sup>

The church confirms. Those who contradict the “divine deed” of the Spirit deny the “terms of the divine discourse.”<sup>108</sup> All knowing is conceived in a corporate

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<sup>106</sup>Stephen R. Holmes, “Calvin on Scripture,” in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology*, ed. Neil B. MacDonald and Carl Trueman, (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 160.

<sup>107</sup>Owen, *On the Divine Originals of Scripture*, 332; cf. Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 287.

<sup>108</sup>Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 164. In arguing for the impetus of the church it does not follow that the authority of the church confers authority on the Scripture. I refer the reader to the previous chapter’s discussion—particularly in the Augustine section. As the Protestants argued, since councils err, and when a community does not hold fast to the divine discourse (substituting its form for the Scripture’s content) the community fails to be representative of the Spirit’s outworking of faith. The traditions of men become the authority rather than the Deity conforming and shaping his people under the direction of his word with the convincing character of his Spirit. A key hermeneutic for any believer is taking into account the commentary of the church in the past—this is why Calvin was adamant to return to the commentary of the Patristics. This is evidenced in such work by Mark Wallace who unwittingly substitutes Augustine’s rule of love hermeneutic without reference to the community in which he was writing. In this way he uses the subjective aspect of the *testimonium* without reference to the objective when he writes, “Here are no extracommunal warrants outside the process of Spirit-discernment—what the Reformed tradition valorizes as the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*—that can apodictically ground the gesture of compassion toward the other.” Mark Wallace, “The Rule of Love and the Testimony of the Spirit in Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *But Is It All True: The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 72.

framework. Richard Bauckham says, “We all, even the most critical and original thinkers, depend on a body of corporate knowledge, much of which has to be taken on trust, and a ‘fiduciary framework’ (Polanyi) of fundamental attitudes which shape the way we test and acquire knowledge. *A tradition of corporate belief is not, as such, the antithesis of reason, but its condition.*”<sup>109</sup> The universal church does not serve as an authority-conferring entity but as an *interpretive* framework for Scripture.<sup>110</sup>

### **Application of the Doctrine to Theological Method**

As was mentioned above, RE does not seek to prove the existence of the *Triune* God.<sup>111</sup> It has powerfully shown that those who believe in God have epistemic warrant for holding such a belief—without need to appeal to external criteria for holding such a belief. This claim is similar to that of perception, testimony, and the belief in other minds.<sup>112</sup> No one is able to give sufficient rationale for why they trust their eyesight, their friend’s testimonials to their favorite ice cream, his friend’s reasons for what he likes is beyond evidences—the existence of his friend’s mind may be open to debate, though.

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<sup>109</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, “Tradition,” 133; emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup>See Polanyi, “Tacit Knowing,” 179; idem, “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading,” in *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 181-207.

<sup>111</sup>Mere belief in God is espoused. By virtue of the fact that Plantinga uses examples from Christianity, it is assumed that the *Triune* God is what is meant, but this is not explicitly argued for. See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 167-356.

<sup>112</sup>Plantinga writes: “Of course there may be other reasons for supposing that although rational belief in other minds does not require an answer to the epistemological question, rational belief in the existence of God does. But it is certainly hard to see what these reasons might be. Hence my tentative conclusion: if my belief in other minds is rational, so is my belief in God. But obviously the former is rational; so, therefore, is the latter.” Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 271. Fiona Ellis has provided a nuance to Plantinga’s “other minds” argument which she terms “expressivist.” She writes, “Behavioural expression already presupposes this something else [i.e., other minds].” Fiona Ellis, “God and Other Minds,” *RelS* 46 (September 2010): 336.

People do not typically accuse the friend of reasoning in a vicious circle. “Circularity of a kind is unavoidable when one seeks to defend an ultimate standard of truth, for one’s defense must itself be accountable to that standard.”<sup>113</sup> The charge of circularity can also be explained by way of interpersonal communication. One’s testimony with reference to himself typically does not need appeal to outside evidences. What is your name? Are you male or female? What color are your eyes? What do you plan on doing today? Why?

Since Scripture is God’s self-communicative act, it, similarly, is not in need of outside criteria to justify it. Yet, as Owen said, from outside (the fiduciary framework of faith) there may be need for evidences; though they are subservient to the actual testimony of the Person—by way of the Holy Spirit. Is such “circularity” succumbing to fideism—“I believe what I believe because I believe it in spite of its contradictions.” Plantinga is helpful at this juncture as well when he offers two categories of fideism: moderate and extreme. The former type *relies* on “faith rather than reason in religious matters” whereas the latter “*disparages* and *denigrates* reason.”<sup>114</sup> Everyone has to place faith in something in order to deduce anything—reason, sense perception, Scripture. He places faith in his ability to deduce from observation. He trusts that his eyes, ears, and nose are reliable recipients of the facts of the world. He believes that what Scripture says, God says; what God says, Scripture says. The point at which such a faith commitment

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<sup>113</sup>John M. Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 7. So also “Arguments are always circular when they seek to validate an ultimate principle of thought. To show that reason is ultimate, one must appeal to reason. To show that sense experience is ultimate, one must show that this view is warranted by sense experience itself. Similarly with history, feeling, experience, and so on.” *Ibid.*, 24-25; cf. 45-46. So also Wolterstorff: “No conclusive ‘rational’ defense can be given for a man’s ultimate philosophical appeal. In cases of conflict between philosophy and faith a man will have to choose; but this choice, in the last resort, cannot be represented as a choice between rationality and irrationality, or rationality and non-rationality.” Wolterstorff, “Faith and Philosophy,” 32.

<sup>114</sup>Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” 87.

becomes irrational is when one denigrates reason, rather than merely relying upon it.<sup>115</sup>

“The Reformed epistemologist is not a fideist as all with respect to belief in God. He does not hold that there is any conflict between faith and reason here, and he does not even hold that we cannot attain this fundamental truth by reason; he holds, instead, that it is among the deliverances of reason.”<sup>116</sup>

RE is accused of being circular, in large measure, due to the lack of self-evaluation by its antagonists.<sup>117</sup> Those set against it have commitments which are also moderately fideistic. Reformed epistemology has questioned Cartesian classic foundationalism in that autonomous human reason is able to deduce (without reference to Scripture) the existence of God and the purpose of life. This attempt to start from Natural Theology always has to leap into a discussion of Special Revelation.<sup>118</sup> “As the Reformed

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<sup>115</sup>So “The Reformed epistemologist, therefore, is a fideist only if he holds that some central truths of Christianity are not among the deliverances of reason and must instead be taken on faith. But just what are the deliverances of reason? What do they include? First, clearly enough, self-evident propositions and propositions that follow from them by self-evidently valid arguments are among the deliverances of reason. But we cannot stop there. Consider someone who holds that according to correct scientific reasoning from accurate observation the earth is at least a couple of billion years old; nonetheless, he adds, the fact is it is no more than some 6000 years old, since that is what faith teaches. Such a person is a fideist, even though the proposition *the earth is more than 6000 years old* is neither self-evident nor a consequence of what is self-evident. So the deliverances of reason include more than self-evident and its consequences. They also include basic perceptual truths (propositions ‘evident to the sense’), incorrigible propositions, certain memory propositions, certain propositions about other minds, and certain moral or ethical propositions.” Ibid., 89; emphasis added. For more on this see Evans, *Faith beyond Reason*, esp. chap. 2.

<sup>116</sup>Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” 90.

<sup>117</sup>So Plantinga: “If the source of the warrant of my Christian belief were this argument, then indeed the project would suffer from vicious circularity. But it isn’t, and it doesn’t. The source of warrant for Christian belief, according to the model, is not argument of any sort; in particular, its warrant does not arise from some argument about how Christian belief can have warrant. To show that there is circularity here, the objector would have to show that any warrant enjoyed by Christian belief *must*, somehow, have come from argument of some sort; and this, as we have seen, can’t be done. This objection, then, is no more successful than the others.” Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 352; emphasis original.

<sup>118</sup>So K. Scott Oliphint, “A Primal and Simple Knowledge (1.1-5),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 35.

thinker sees things, being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. . . . Belief in God, like other properly basic beliefs, is not groundless or arbitrary; it is grounded in justification-conferring conditions.”<sup>119</sup> Further,

Being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. Furthermore, one who holds that belief in God is properly basic is not thereby committed to the idea that belief in God is groundless or gratuitous or without justifying circumstances. And even if he lacks a general criterion of proper basicity, he is not obliged to suppose that just any, or nearly any, belief—belief in the Great Pumpkin, for example—is properly basic. Like everyone should, he begins with examples; and he may take belief in the Great Pumpkin, in certain circumstances, as a paradigm of irrational beliefs.<sup>120</sup>

The primary difference between Great Pumpkinism and Christian theism is that the deity of the latter has recorded his speech-acts. In order to inform man of salvation, “God needed a way to inform us—us human beings of many different times and places. . . . He chose to do so by way of a three-tiered cognitive process.”<sup>121</sup> The three tiers are: Scripture, “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ himself before his death and resurrection, and invoked and celebrated in the epistles of the apostle Paul,”<sup>122</sup> and faith. Plantinga, then, proceeds to ground the authority of Scripture in the acceptance of the believer. This proves to be a problem, because it abstains from giving objective ground to Scripture as God’s speech. Secondly, it makes the Christian experience unable to adjudicate the need for people of all cultures to submit to the Christian God.

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>120</sup>Plantinga, “On Taking Belief in God as Basic,” 16.

<sup>121</sup>Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 243.

The Reformed epistemologist makes the bold move to question whether the Christian has to defend the charges of the skeptic at all. “Followers of Bertrand Russell and Madelyn Murray O’Hare may disagree, but how is that relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community, conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to its set of examples, not to theirs.”<sup>123</sup> It is at this juncture that criticism has been leveled at RE. Ollenberger criticizes Wolterstorff for not being able to adjudicate between competing truth claims.<sup>124</sup> Appeal is made by RE to Scripture and the *testimonium*. If the *testimonium* is reduced to divine illumination, then Ollenberger has a point. However, it is the contention of this author that the *testimonium* also includes the historical appointment by Jesus and the reminding and interpretive work of Jesus’ ministry by the apostles.<sup>125</sup> Plantinga cites three elements of the work of the Spirit present

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>He further criticizes Wolterstorff of the husk-kernel hermeneutic of Scripture. While importing too much Bultmann theory into the discussion, the critique points to a vital issue in Wolterstorff’s view. The *esse* of Scripture must entail infallibility and inerrancy. Granted, the definition of inerrancy should not be mechanical and succumb to dictation theory, but dictation theory is not necessitated by inerrancy. So also Jason Hunt who strikes at those who limit God’s ability to communicate truly, not limited by man’s cultural perspectivalism. He writes: “With regard to the concept of inerrant *autographa*, McGowan objects to the idea of holding such a concept in order to uphold God’s veracity. To him, this underestimates God’s ability (i.e., that God *must* deliver inerrant *autographa*). Yet, is such a theological argument unwarranted? Ironically, his criticism is also based on a theological argument, namely that God’s unlimited ability enables him to reveal himself through errant texts. This begs the question: Who is really limiting God? Does God have more freedom in working against nature (through fallible authors and finite language?) or with nature in such a way as to preserve his truth down to the very word, making them both his words and their words at the same time? Why should God’s freedom and ability be dependent on working through human error? It would seem that McGowan implies another false dichotomy in suggesting that God’s freedom is in opposition to the giving of inerrant originals.” Jason B. Hunt, “Bavinck and the Princetonians on Scripture: A Difference in Doctrine or Defense?,” *JETS* 53 (2010): 328.

<sup>125</sup>It is important to note that the interpretive work of the Spirit is evidenced in the apostles’ ability to interpret the parables of Jesus. Whereas Jesus sought to conceal the kingdom through parables, thereby indicting the blindness and hard-heartedness of his hearers, it is by the unction of the Spirit that recipients of the written testimonies are able to understand the parables Jesus’ hearers could not—due to the lack of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

in Calvin: 1) the production of Scripture; 2) “the presence and action of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ himself before his death and resurrection, and invoked and celebrated in the epistles of the apostle Paul”;<sup>126</sup> 3) provocation to faith in the believer—where “faith” is “to know and hence *believe* something or other.”<sup>127</sup> These three separate, but interconnected, aspects of the Spirit’s work must all be affirmed to understand the *testimonium* aright—which is intimately tied to Scripture’s *autopistia*.

A correct understanding of this three-fold work of the inner testimony of the Spirit redeems RE from extreme fideism. Horton writes,

The Spirit is not a secondary source for divine revelation in addition to scripture, but the latter’s author as well as illuminator. *The canon is revelation regardless of a given persons’ response*, but it can only be recognized as such though the event of illumination. . . . The inner testimony of the Spirit is hardly something alongside the Word, but is effected from within the Word.<sup>128</sup>

This explanation is simply a way of getting at Calvin’s inseparability of the Spirit and the Word.

At any point a person makes claims to ultimate authority, his argument must have a kind of circularity.<sup>129</sup> Rationalism proves itself by use of reason, naturalism by way of natural observation, scientism by way of science. Carson concurs,

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<sup>126</sup>Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 243.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 244; see also the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 21.

<sup>128</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 209. So also Van den Belt: “If the *testimonium* is only an individual witness of the Spirit to Scripture, it is a form of circular reasoning because then Scripture is proved from the *testimonium* and the *testimonium* is proved from Scripture. The *testimonium internum*, however, is not individualistic, but related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in Scripture and confirmed by the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the church. . . . To avoid circular reasoning the witness of the Spirit in Scripture is underlined; the *testimonium* comes to us indirectly via the divine characteristics of Scripture. The emphasis shifts from the *autopistia* of Scripture to the *notae* and *criteria* of its divinity.” Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 287, 289.

<sup>129</sup>See John Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 134-41.

There is a profound sense in which all human thought . . . is circular in some sense. We are finite creatures; without the faculty of omniscience we have not absolutely certain base on which to build. The Christian's claim is that God himself, who does enjoy perfect knowledge, provides the basis for us—but that, of course, the basis itself must be taken (so far as finite creatures are concerned) on faith.<sup>130</sup>

To quote Hodge and Warfield,

The only really dangerous opposition to the Church doctrine of inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from some false view of God's relation to the world, of his methods of working, and of the possibility of a supernatural agency penetrating and altering the course of a natural process. But the whole genius of Christianity, all of its essential and most characteristic doctrines, presuppose the immanence of God in all his creatures, and his concurrence with them in all of their spontaneous activities.<sup>131</sup>

Such transcendentalism in arguing for the existence of the Triune God, it must be remembered, is merely a method of argumentation.<sup>132</sup> The Muslim, Hindu, Secularist can all claim that their belief is ultimate because of an Ultimate Principle. When it comes to discerning between competing faith systems, it is vital to evaluate that particular faith system on its own terms. Since all faith systems suffer from a kind of circularity, it is important to evaluate their internal coherence and external relationship to the way things are in the world. This does not smuggle in reason as the final arbiter for truth claims, but utilizes it in tandem with the Christian Scriptures. That is, man is able to reason given his status as *imago Dei*. Further, other world religions cannot account for reason, given their

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<sup>130</sup>Carson, "Approaching the Bible," 35.

<sup>131</sup>Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 9.

<sup>132</sup>See Immanuel Kant, "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God (1763)," in *Theoretical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107-202. As Kant explained, "Our concept of the dependency of the very essences themselves of all things upon God here turns out to be of even greater use than expected in this question. The things of nature, even in the most necessary determinations of their internal possibilities, display the characteristic mark of dependency upon that Being, in which everything harmonises with the attributes of wisdom and goodness." *Ibid.*, 152.

worldview. Therefore, by using reason, the Christian utilizes the Scriptures and its presentation of the way the world fits together.

### **Historicity**

Upon evaluation of the various discourses found in other religions, a disconnect between the natural and supernatural becomes apparent. The strength of the Christian apologetic consists in its rootedness in history. Wolterstorff says that, with reference to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, that much of the emphasis is on the a-historical, philosophical orientation—speaking of *principia*. The *autopistia* of Scripture finds strength in the actual history Scripture presents. Horton concurs but provides an addendum: “It would seem that covenant provides a broader and more definite context for discourse (that God speaks) and canonicity (that God speaks here).”<sup>133</sup> Too often, the weakness in narrative theologians has been the issue of referent. Are there errors in its recounting? That is, does Scripture present the events of history truly?<sup>134</sup> Whereas Wolterstoff is unable to answer at what points there is overlap between divine inspiration and divine discourse, Horton provides a broader framework of covenant and canon to provide such adjudication. That is, the words of the covenant, which were written by men, were inspired by God to be written for his people. The words in the canon are God’s inspired speech to his covenant community.

The historicity of the Christian faith is rooted in God’s relation to the world he has created. As Hodge wrote, “It is very evident that since we are able to comprehend

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<sup>133</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 138.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

neither God's essential being, nor his mode of existence superior to the limits of earlier time or space, nor the nature of his agency in creating, upholding in being being or in governing his creatures, we cannot by any central principle or *a priori* mode of reasoning think out a perfect theory of his relation to the universe."<sup>135</sup> In other words, Scripture is the only way in which we can know God's interpretation of the facts of history. God is glorious in nature and can be conceived in the minds of those created *imago Dei* by observing what he has created. But, Hodge notes, three things are also true that inform one's view of Scripture. First, "God is unknowable, the infinite Abyss of darkness in which the universe floats as an atom."<sup>136</sup> Second, "God is transcendent; that is he is a distinct Person, separate from the world and from all other persons—who speaks to us face to face, who commands our wills and regulates our lives from on high; who upon occasion, when he wills, acts upon the universe or any part of it from without."<sup>137</sup> Third, "God is immanent."<sup>138</sup> In fact, divine immanence lies at the heart of all religion.<sup>139</sup> All three aspects, however, must be held in tandem to be biblical. That is, Deists hold to the first two, but deny the third. Pantheists affirm the first and third, but deny the second. If God is to be God he must be beyond us, above us, before us, within us.<sup>140</sup>

In this dissertation, a recounting of Scripture has worked from the assumption that the events presented in its pages actually occurred in history. "It is indeed true that

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<sup>135</sup>Hodge, *Evangelical Theology*, 14.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

for us today belief in the crucifixion and the resurrection can never be a matter of sense-perception. Yet this should not blind us to the fact that God did frequently give empirical verification of himself. The patriarchal, prophetic and apostolic testimony is neither more nor less than testimony to such empirical episodes.”<sup>141</sup> Certainly there are theological points made by the recounting of the events in history. The sovereignty of YHWH over the gods of Egypt is just as theological as it is historical. Too often biblical scholarship has operated from a naturalistic presupposition that sifts the accounts of Scripture through the sieve of Naturalism. Rather than taking Scripture on its own terms, theologians have weakened the theology of the Bible. Further, the ethics of operating from such presuppositions are suspect. If a theologian cannot trust the witnesses of Scripture her theology is suspect. Like Irenaeus before, there is no access to the Christ without the instrument of Scripture.<sup>142</sup>

In reference to Calvin’s discussion of self-authenticating Scripture, Wolterstorff says that instead of an a-historical argument a more satisfying answer lies in an historical tracing of divine discourse.<sup>143</sup> When one considers the recognition of the

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>141</sup>Donald Macleod, “Herman Bavinck and the Basis of Christian Certainty,” *SBET* 29 (2011): 99.

<sup>142</sup>This is not to discount the need to read Scripture according to genre and historical purpose. Further, hermeneutical issues abound—authorial intention, ANE history, language translations, canonical reading. That is not the purpose of this work. It is the assumption of this author that we must read Scripture with authorial intention in mind—both the Divine and the human. The intention is read in light of the historical setting. This is then read in light of the canonical structure. All three pieces assume the historical truthfulness of the witness and their ability to portray God’s thoughts after him—a concursive theory of inspiration.

<sup>143</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 288.

canon, he realizes that “the church was only willing to acknowledge as apostles those who had been commissioned to that office by God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>144</sup>

### **The Aseity of God and Analogous Theology**

How are these things to be self-evident unless grounded in the Christian Scripture? Christian theology can only speak to its respective culture by beginning with the Scriptures. The commonality Christianity has with other religions stems from all people being created *imago Dei* and the Christian worldview grounding all other religious claims. Scripture makes Hodge’s three aspects prerequisite in theology and anthropology. For, “In all our knowing, God is always beyond us, hid in the light which is impenetrable. . . . At the same time, God is ever within us, the ultimate ground of our being and the unfailing source of our life, the wellspring of eternal life, the inspiration of all spiritual knowledge and beatitudes, springing up within us to the ages of the ages.”<sup>145</sup>

Given God’s utter transcendence, his perfect aseity, the only means by which man can understand him is by condescension. “Man’s inability to comprehend God is

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 291. While Wolterstorff is immensely helpful in explaining the pattern of biblical authority being rooted in history, his presupposition that truthfulness of Scripture is not in view is misaligned. That is, the biblical narrative is built off the assumption that God speaks and that what he says to man is true. For Wolterstorff’s treatment of the truthfulness of Scripture see Nicholas Wolterstorff, “True Words,” in *But Is It All True: The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 34-43. See below for a critique.

<sup>145</sup>Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 32. This way of speaking about God is very different than the way the Princetonians are depicted by many. That is, they speak as though the Princetonians did not have a grasp of God’s utter transcendence. Rather, they malign their theology to be that of one who has put God in a box. Hodge has made it clear that God is unknowable *in esse*, but has graciously, and providentially, made himself known in Scripture.

founded on the very fact that God is *completely self-determinative*.<sup>146</sup> Thus, the finite and created are incapable of understanding the self-contained God. All human thought is analogical, never univocal. Since God is a being qualitatively different than man all language about him will, by necessity, be anthropomorphic.<sup>147</sup> This does not mean, however, that it is less true, merely man can never know God as he is in himself.

### **Application of the Doctrine to Apologetics**

Scripture offers the believer all that is needed to argue for the truth of the Christian faith. Scripture is clear. Scripture presents the history of the world for the salvation of people from all tribes, peoples, and tongues. The events in an inconsequential town in Palestine proved to have consequences for everyone that would ever live. The self-authenticating nature of Scripture necessitates that the theologian *begin* with Scripture. Detractors most definitely will need to be answered, yet it is the twofold function of the Spirit's work that is necessary for him to place faith in Scripture's witness—the production of the Scripture by the appropriated witnesses by his unction and the illumination of the text. In the work of apologetics (application of theology to an unbelieving world), the work of the Spirit is critical. As Van Til has said,

Preaching is confronted with the same dilemma as is apologetical reasoning. In both cases the Roman Catholic and the Arminian tone down the facts of the gospel in order to gain acceptance for them on the part of the natural man. In neither case will the Reformed apologist do so. In both cases he will challenge the natural man at the outset. Both in preaching and in reasoning—and every approach to the natural man

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<sup>146</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 9-10.

<sup>147</sup>A. B. Caneday, "Is Theological Truth Functional or Propositional: Postconservatism's Use of Language Games and Speech-Act Theory," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 137-59.

should be both—the Reformed theologian will ask the sinner to do what he knows the sinner of himself cannot do.<sup>148</sup>

In this way, the theologian must depend on the work of the Spirit when responding to defeaters to faith. He needs the illumination of the Spirit to rightly interpret the Scripture, and his detractor needs the Spirit to accept God’s testimony as true. Frame develops this idea,

We learn of this sovereign God from Scripture; this is part of its message. But when we learn of such a God, we realize that such a God *must* identify himself. Such a God . . . identifies all the facts of the universe. In identifying all the facts of the universe he sets these facts in relation to one another. Thus, a word of God, giving his own authoritative promise of redemption, must be self-attesting. Scripture, as that Word, needs no corroboration from any source outside itself; and no such corroboration is possible, unless the other source is already subject to the interpretation and evaluation of Scripture. If Scripture is self-attesting, then it bears the traditional attributes—necessity, authority, perspicuity, and sufficiency.<sup>149</sup>

Further, when defending the Christian faith, the apologist must begin with the Christian faith. He does not merely set forth a theistic argument for God’s existence. It is not merely that belief in God is basic to human knowledge. Reformed Epistemologists have done a service for the Christian insofar that they have shown that someone is not irrational if he believes in God. Yet, RE has not pressed the issue far enough for the purposes of adjudicating the truthfulness of the Christian faith. “We must not defend a general theism first and then later defend Christianity. Rather, the apologist must defend only the distinctive theism of Christianity. . . . The main issue between non-Christians

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<sup>148</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 195.

<sup>149</sup>Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 124.

and Christians is not incidental facts and occasional logical mistakes. Rather, the issue is the self-contained ontological Trinity.”<sup>150</sup>

Evidences can be mounted to respond to every doubt, but, as every apologist can attest, those evidences cannot move the skeptic to faith. In every instance the Spirit of God must work on the mind and fiduciary framework that the skeptic holds. “Human testimony cooperates with the testimony of the Holy Spirit not as an independent source of warrant, but as one condition under which faith *by the Spirit* is realized.”<sup>151</sup> In the same way the Spirit cooperated with the minds of the authors of Scripture to say what he wanted them to say, so also the Spirit works with the reason of the unbeliever. Kevin Diller’s excellent essay helps in this regard:

Warrant is generated by a divinely designed and intended doxastic experience whereby the truth of Christian propositions becomes apparent without inference from other propositions. In this situation there is an analogy to perception. The warrant is conferred by a process wherein the believer is enabled to apprehend the truth if the belief. Because this kind of belief is more direct than one that is *mediated* by inference, it is arguably a firmer and more satisfactory way to believe, in the same way that seeing for oneself is superior to depending on external testimony.<sup>152</sup>

The Spirit of God appropriates the divine discourse so that the unbeliever is able to see for oneself that what Scripture says is true. Just as the work of Jesus was

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<sup>150</sup>John Frame, “Divine Aseity and Apologetics,” in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 119, 125.

<sup>151</sup>Kevin S. Diller, “Can Arguments Boost Warrant for Christian Belief: Warrant Boosting and the Primacy of Divine Revelation,” *RelS* 47 (2011): 195; emphasis original.

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, 192.

evident to all the disciples, it was Peter who received the divine illumination by God that enabled him to place faith in Jesus' ministry.<sup>153</sup>

Diller again says,

Arguments can be understood to function as warrant catalysts within the orchestration of the sovereign action of God, without themselves directly contributing to the source of warrant for Christian belief. . . . There is, however, no sense of an independent rational capacity to bring oneself to belief, which would compromise the primacy of divine revelation (PDR); neither is there a *need* to affirm even a rational capacity to contribute to the warrant for full fledged faith.<sup>154</sup>

The second part of the above quotation is pertinent to the point of Scripture being the *principia* for theology. No amount of reasoning, apart from the gracious interpretation by the Holy Spirit, will lead someone to faith in Christ. "No mere academic discipline, marshalling evidence and appealing to universal reason, can put us in touch with ultimate certainty. Whether in history, morals or physics our approximations to truth are always tentative and provisional."<sup>155</sup> Bavinck concurs, "The Christian faith is not a venture into probabilities. Faith (as in all religions) offers a certainty not obtained through mere argumentation. Scientific proofs only touch the facts externally and do not penetrate their heart and essence . . . they lead us to an empty tomb but not to the living Savior."<sup>156</sup>

It is not as though evangelicals have sought to ground their authority and certainty in some indubitable principle outside of Scripture. Rather, because God can and has communicated his perfect will to humanity, believers can rest on his truth as sure.

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<sup>153</sup>An illumination that would be imparted to all the apostles in the Upper Room. An illumination promised by Jesus (John 15:26-27; 16:12-15).

<sup>154</sup>Diller, "Can Arguments Boost Warrant," 195; emphasis original. See also Horace Fairlamb's article, in which he offers an explanation called "reformed evidentialism": Horace Fairlamb, "Sanctifying Evidentialism," *RelS* 46 (2010): 61-76.

<sup>155</sup>Macleod, "Herman Bavinck," 98; compare the discussion offered by Polanyi above.

Exhaustive, self-evident knowledge is not necessary. “Scripture continues to be the supreme norm for Christian faith and life, then, not as an epistemic norm that caters to modernity’s craving for certainty, but as a *sapiential* norm that provides direction for one’s fitting participation in the great evangelical drama of redemption.”<sup>157</sup>

It has typically been argued that to begin with Scripture is to denigrate the place of evidences. Only an extreme fideist (to borrow Plantinga’s terminology) would deny the necessity of evidence. The evidences necessary, however, serve as confirmation of what is presented in Scripture—*a posteriori*. The authority of Scripture remains prior to the work of theology—*a priori*. The church relied on evidences to verify who authored the texts it would recognize as God’s Word. In the same way, the authority of the apostles existed *before* the church recognized those writings. The church required evidence that Peter, James, and Paul actually wrote these texts. The authority of the writings could never depend on the community—the writings stood over the community. Therefore, Scripture is prior and the supreme authority for life and doctrine for the community.

Christian theology is not a mere ascension to truth. The theologian must always embrace the Christ of the Scriptures. In the same way Judas knew the facts of Jesus’ ministry, he did not fully grasp the implications of that ministry. The need for the work of the Holy Spirit to illumine his appropriated discourse is essential to grasp the meaning of the text. Without his work in the authors of Scripture and his work in the hearts of believers, there can be no certainty of faith. The objective witness of the Spirit is

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<sup>156</sup>Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Paideia, 1980), 28.

<sup>157</sup>Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 167.

accessible to all. The subjective witness of the Spirit depends upon his choosing (John 3:8).

Given the Bible's view of man and the noetic effects of the Fall, it is essential that the Spirit of God give life to whom he will. Evidences serve to make faith intelligible, but they are derivative from the biblical testimony. For it is impossible to have rationality without the ground of the biblical worldview. "As to the possibility and likelihood of the sinner's accepting the Christian position, it must be said that this is a matter of the grace of God. As the creature of God, made in the image of God, he is always accessible to God. As a rational creature he can understand that one must either accept the whole of a system of truth or reject the whole of it."<sup>158</sup> For, "in non-Christian thought, it is man himself who becomes epistemologically *a se*. . . . When a thinker claims that human reason, experience, or feeling is the ultimate criterion of truth, he is claiming epistemological aseity."<sup>159</sup> As Van Til writes, "The real struggle for the soul of

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 196. See also T. S. Eliot who perceptively writes: "Even in works of Christian apologetic, the assumption is sometimes that of the secular mind. Any apologetic which presents the Christian faith as a *preferable alternative* to secular philosophy, which fights secularism on its own ground, is making a concession which is a preparation for defeat. Apologetic which proceeds from part to part of the body of Christian belief, testing each by itself according to secular standards of credibility, and which attempts to constitute Christian belief as a body of acceptable parts, so as to end by placing the least possible burden of faith, seems to me to be a reversal of the proper method. *Should we not first try to apprehend the meaning of Christianity as a whole, leading the mind to contemplate first the great gulf between the Christian mind and the secular habits of thought and feeling into which, so far as we fail to watch and pray, we all tend to fall? When we have appreciated the awfulness of this difference, we are in a better position to examine the body of our belief analytically, and consider what is permanent truth, and what is transient or mistaken.* As even the disciples, during the life of our Lord and immediately after His death and resurrection, suffered from occasional lapses of faith, what are we to expect of a world in which the will has been powerfully and increasingly misdirected for a long time past? What a discursive reading of the literature of secularism, over a number of years, leads me to believe, however, is that the religious sentiment—which can only be completely satisfied by the complete message of revelation—is simply suffering from a condition of repression painful for those in whom it is repressed, who yearn for the fulfillment of belief, although too ashamed of that yearning to allow it to come to consciousness." T. S. Eliot, "I," in *Revelation*, ed. John Baillie and Hugh Martin (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 37-39; emphasis added.

<sup>159</sup>Frame, "Divine Aseity," 127.

man and with it for the intelligibility of science, philosophy and theology can be seen for what it is only if the two totality views of man and his environment, the one represented by historic Protestant thinking and the other by modern dimensionalism are set squarely over against one another.”<sup>160</sup> And again he writes,

God’s work of redemption through Christ, therefore, comes into enemy territory. It comes to save from themselves those who do not want to be saved, because they think that they do not need to be saved. It is this situation, as has been indicated by Reformed theologians, that accounts for the need of inscripturation of the authoritative and redemptive Word of God. But this view of sin itself comes from Scripture as authoritative. Experience apart from Scripture does not teach such a doctrine.<sup>161</sup>

T. S. Eliot says this much,

We must remember also that the choice between Christianity and secularism is not simply presented to the innocent mind, *anima simplicetta*, as to an impartial judge capable of choosing the best when the causes have both been fully pleaded. The whole tendency of education (in the widest sense—the influences playing on the common mind in the forms of “enlightenment”) has been for a long time to form minds more and more adapted to secularism, less and less equipped to apprehend the doctrine of revelation and its consequences.<sup>162</sup>

Paul sets two worldviews at odds with each other. There is the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:18-31). God has made himself known to man, not by mere natural revelation, but by the operation of his Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16). Even before the Fall man was dependent upon God’s interpretation of nature. Even more so, after the Fall, man *needs* God’s interpretation as to how things are set right. “Man does not need

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<sup>160</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 336. See also Ramm, where he writes, “The Protestant thus judges that both religious liberalism’s subjectivism and Catholicism’s ecclesiastical authoritarianism (as extreme as they are with regard to each other) are instances of the finite sitting in the place of the Infinite.” Ramm, *The Pattern of Authority*, 25.

<sup>161</sup>Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 27.

<sup>162</sup>Eliot, “I,” 37.

the Scriptures because he is finite; he needs them because he is a sinner.”<sup>163</sup> Man needs his entire noetic structure re-calibrated to be in submission to God. In this way, God’s word is both the interpretation of the facts of history and the soteriological necessity to know Jesus Christ’s work of redemption. From beginning to ending, interpretation and salvation are by the sheer grace of God.<sup>164</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation has sought to argue that apart from affirming Scripture’s self-authenticating authority there can be no sure foundation for doing systematic theology. If Scripture’s authority is grounded outside itself, then either tradition or culture must adjudicate which aspects of Scripture are truth and which are spurious. Perspecuity is baseless. Sola Scriptura is meaningless. Sufficiency is compromised. Man is left hopeless. In this way, Scripture’s self-attestation is paramount in the ability to talk about God, his actions in the world, and his purposes for his creatures.

Christians do not merely affirm a subjective adherence to what the church has always believed. They do not unwittingly ascribe to fideism because they believe that God the Father willed, God the Son created, and God the Spirit brings to pass because they learned about these things from Scripture. Indeed, Scripture is the covenantal document by which men may know God and his will for their lives. Scripture elucidates the glory of God that is written in the heavens. Scripture illuminates how all that is wrong in the world can be made right. Without Scripture, man would know nothing of why he is

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 52. So also Van Til writes, “Because of sin in the heart of man, the Word of God thus acquires the greatest possible permanence of form. It is, as the inscripturated Word of God, less liable to perversion than mere tradition would be.” Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 27.

frustrated, why the world is not as it should be, and how all of this has been set right by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Believers through the centuries knew they could depend on men like Moses and the prophets because they had been commissioned by YHWH to speak on his behalf. Verily they were YHWH's representation in the eyes and ears of the people. By virtue of their commission and having been in the presence of God, they were empowered by his Spirit to record his words for posterity. With the advent of the fore-written Messiah, God's people were able to see God with their very eyes. Because the apostles had been in the presence of God Incarnate they were commissioned to be Jesus' representation and to write authoritatively for posterity.

The authors of Scripture do not write under the assumption that they are ruminating on the divine. Rather, they write with the utmost conviction that what they say as Jesus' representatives must be heeded. They place their writings on the same authoritative level as the written covenant that came before them. They both affirm the OT's authority by shaping their lives and doctrine around it and they affirm the necessity of believing their message.

As this doctrine is applied to the Christian life, the believer can be convinced that what he holds in the pages of Scripture is God's very words to him. This does not mean that everything is plain to understand. Some things are difficult to interpret (especially separated from the original audience by millennia). This does not, however, mean that the present reader was not intended to apply Scripture to his life. God has

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<sup>164</sup>So also Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 196.

redeemed the believer and adopted him into a family of faith so that he is able to seek help in understanding difficult passages.

As this doctrine is applied to the unbeliever, God's very words and will must be proclaimed. Although the god of this world has blinded the mind's eye of the unbeliever, the same God who spoke Creation into existence can also speak life into mortal rebels. Just as the Gospel is preached in faith that God will apply the doctrines to the hearers' hearts, so also God's Word is preached in faith so that the unbeliever will place his faith in Christ. This sealing upon the heart, this convincing of the veracity of God's Word is done by the work of the Holy Spirit. Surely evidences for the resurrection and manuscripts can be helpful, but they do not provide surety, given man's finitude and sinfulness. What is needed is a transcendental encounter with the triune God through the message of the Bible. And just like the wind, he moves and convicts and illumines where he will. Man does not stand over God and his Word judging whether it is true or not. He always stands under God and his authoritative words either a convicted sinner or a justified believer.

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### **Dissertations**

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SELF-ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE PROPER GROUND FOR SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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This dissertation examines the Protestant doctrine of Scripture's self-witness of divine authority. Chapter 1 examines the current evangelical milieu. The doctrine has become nearly obsolete in the discussion of systematic theology. Consequentially, wherein lies authority has been greatly misunderstood in Protestant circles.

Chapter 2 surveys the doctrine through the history of the church. Particular note is made of Augustine, John Calvin, John Owen, and Herman Bavinck. This chapter evinces the near consensus of the church that the authority for the Church is found preeminently in the Scriptures.

Chapter 3 summarizes post-conservative, Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, attempts to ground theology in Scripture *plus* culture and tradition. This chapter does not offer a critique as much as it aims to represent post-conservatives in their own words.

Chapter 4 looks at how the Old Testament viewed itself—particularly through the ministries of Moses and the prophets. YHWH chose representatives who would speak to the covenant community and write down the stipulations and history of YHWH's relationship with Israel for posterity.

Chapter 5 looks at the New Testament, which follows the paradigm instituted by the Old Testament. In the person and work of Jesus Christ, God's promises find their fulfillment, which foments his commissioning of the apostles to be his spokesmen.

Chapter 6 ties together the threads that cohere in the two testaments of Scripture. It makes explicit the claims of Scripture that God is *a se*, he communicates with his creation, he uses spokesmen, and his written Word is its own witness for its authority.

Chapter 7 defines the doctrine of Scripture's self-witness and applies it to tradition, culture, and the task of apologetics. The chapter explicates the thesis of the dissertation that Scripture's self-witness must be the ground of systematic theology.

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