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THUS SAYS THE LORD:
A TRINITARIAN ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
John Thomas English III
December 2014

APPROVAL SHEET

THUS SAYS THE LORD:

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I dedicate this dissertation to my godly, loving, and supportive wife, Macy English. You were one of the first people to teach me about God and to read Scripture with me. I will never forget that as God continues to use you to teach me about himself everyday.

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PREFACE

Many people have contributed to this dissertation, both directly and indirectly. First, I would like to thank Dr. Gregg Allison, my doctoral supervisor. He has my sincere gratitude as he has been a wonderful supervisor and mentor through the entirety of my doctoral studies. Second, my heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, whose work and thought have been deeply influential and helpful to me. I am especially grateful for his supervision of an Independent Study on Triune Discourse that he conducted with me during the 2013 academic year. That course helped me tremendously. Third, I am thankful for the Research Doctoral Studies program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, especially the leadership of Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington. I am proud to have been included in such a fine program. Fourth, my gratitude goes to several friends who were always willing to do theology with me. Specifically, I thank Dr. Oren Martin and Tyler Wittman, two friends and theologians for whom I am deeply grateful. Fifth, I would like to thank my family, specifically Jack English & Marcy and Todd Glasser, for all of their encouragement along the way. Their prayers, notes, and thoughtful words of support always came at just the right moment. Lastly, I will be forever indebted to my wife, Macy English. Without her, this dissertation, and my doctoral program, would not have been impossible. She has been the kind of wife and bride to me of whom I do not consider myself worthy. Macy, you are one of God's most gracious gifts to me. Thank you.

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December 2014

CHAPTER 1

THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Introduction

One of the most fundamental and astonishing claims in Christian theology is that God has made himself known. Christianity is a revealed religion. The Christian faith professes that the ultimate reality, God, has graciously and with clarity revealed himself to his creation. In the study of all other sciences, humankind places itself above the object of its investigation and actively elicits from it its knowledge through the acts of observation and interpretation. Theological knowledge is altogether different. In theology, man does not stand above, but rather under, the object of his knowledge. Therefore, in theology, man can only know God insofar as the latter actively makes himself known.¹ However, revelation is not primarily the imparting of information but rather the self-giving and self-evidencing of God.² In his grace, God has condescended to his creatures in order that creation may be in communion with the creator. “Knowledge of the triune God belongs to humanity only when revealed,” notes Michael Allen.³ Thus, God’s revelation, specifically the biblical text, is God’s authoritative self-giving and self-presentation of himself and his works.⁴

¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 34. Berkhoff further notes, “When one speaks of God’s revelation, the term is used in an active sense. It is not something in which he is passive, a mere “becoming manifest,” but something in which he is actively making himself known.” Ibid.

²Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 17.

³R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 18.

⁴It is outside the scope of this dissertation to discuss the nature and authority of general

The doctrine of Scripture, specifically its authority, is an issue of central importance in any theological formulation that is distinctly Christian. However, with the rise of modernity and postmodernity, there is perhaps no doctrine that has been under greater assault than biblical authority. The kinds of challenges that have been leveled against biblical authority generally follow the history of literary criticism, namely, challenges against the author, the text, and the reader.⁵ Modernity challenged the need for a divine author and found the concept of divine revelation unreasonable. The death of authorship necessarily led to the question of whether a text has meaning at all.⁶ Further, if one questions the relationship between an author and a text, and whether or not a text can have meaning, one will also necessarily question the function, responsibility, and role of a reader.⁷

Christianity has always been charged with testifying to the authority and truthfulness of the biblical text, and the ability of interpreters to comprehend biblical truth. Most, if not all, evangelical constructions of Scripture's authority appeal entirely to the divine origin of Scripture; that is, Scripture is authoritative because it is God's Word. This line of argumentation rightly assumes that the divine source of Scripture has implications for its ontology and function. In other words, the origin of the biblical text

revelation. Paul, speaking on the topic of general revelation, makes it clear that God's general revelation is authoritative and clear: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Rom 1:19).

⁵See, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 25.

⁶See, Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), and Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁷Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel C. Weinsheimer (New York: Crossroad, 1982). Gadamer argues, on the one hand, against modern approaches to interpretation that rely heavily on rigorous scientific methods. On the other hand, he argues against the ability to recover the original intention of the author. He contends that all interpreters have a historically affected consciousness, or presuppositions, which necessarily influence the interpretation of any text. Therefore, interpretation is the fusion of horizons, and meaning is found not in the text itself, but in a conversation between the text and a reader.

indicates what it is and what it does. As Scripture speaks, so God speaks. Any account of Scripture must be rooted in the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of God must be rooted in Scripture.⁸ J. I. Packer notes, “When you encounter a present-day view of Holy Scripture, you encounter more than a view of Scripture. What you meet is a total view of God and the world, that is, a total theology, which is both an ontology, declaring what there is, and an epistemology, stating how we know what there is.”⁹ Bernard Ramm draws on the relationship between the doctrine of God and biblical authority when he argues that inspiration is the connecting link between special revelation and biblical authority.¹⁰ The doctrine of Scripture is inseparably and inextricably linked to who God is, what he says, and what he does. Accordingly, in an increasingly postmodern and post-Christian landscape, evangelicals need to provide a robust account of Scripture’s authority that still roots authority in the author of the text.

In the case of the doctrine of Scripture, the assistance that dogmatics provides is undoubtedly a description of Scripture’s origin and nature.¹¹ In Christian theological usage, Scripture is an ontological category; to speak of the Bible as Holy Scripture is to indicate what it is. In Christian theological usage, the Bible is not an ordinary book. Christians affirm the extraordinary nature of the Bible, and they intend to say more than

⁸This point is elaborated on by Kevin Vanhoozer when he argues, “First theology concerns the nature of the relation between God and Scripture...because our view of Scripture affects our view of God, just as our view of God affects our view of Scripture.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 30. Also see, Stephen J. Wellum, “An Investigation of the Interrelationship Between the Doctrines of Divine Action, Sovereignty, Omniscience, and Scripture and Its Significance for Contemporary Debates on Biblical Authority” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996).

⁹J. I. Packer, “Encountering Present-Day Views of Scripture,” in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 61.

¹⁰See Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

¹¹J. B. Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 36.

simply that these writings constitute great literature.¹² Christians believe that the Bible is the very Word of God. Therefore, when Christians speak of the ontology of the Bible, they are addressing its very nature. It is the Bible's status as God's Word that accounts for its extraordinary nature and for the church's treatment of the Bible as sacred literature.¹³

Furthermore, although it may not be apparent at first, developing a robust account of Scripture, and in this case a theology of Scripture's authority, requires a *trinitarian* description of revelation. The God who has revealed himself in the pages of Scripture is the God who has eternally existed as Trinity. Therefore, an important question is, "What implications do trinitarian operations have on a doctrine of biblical authority?" If the Bible speaks about the authoritative speech of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, what kind of an impact should that have on biblical authority? In what way can a Christian account of biblical authority speak of the authority of the Father, the authority of the Son, and the authority of the Spirit? Accounts of Scripture that consider the divine economy of triune discourse were common prior to the rise of modernity and modern biblical studies, but presently remain at the margins of contemporary theological work.¹⁴ This dissertation will seek to address how the internal resources of the Christian trinitarian tradition can provide clarity and depth to the standard evangelical account of biblical authority. Indeed, its primary purpose is to answer the question: What is the relationship between the authority of Scripture and trinitarian communicative agency?¹⁵

¹²Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 3.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 4.

¹⁵Trinitarian communicative agency refers to the revelatory act of God that proceeds from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 101.

Need

Some may question the need for a study such as this because the authority of Scripture is often the first claim evangelical believers want to make about the Bible.¹⁶ But, as Carl F. H. Henry pointed out, “Nowhere does the crisis of modern theology find a more critical center than in the controversy over the reality and nature of divine disclosure.”¹⁷ Herman Bavinck contended, “Without authority and faith, religion and theology cannot exist for even a moment.”¹⁸ *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* makes a similar point in its opening preface by noting, “The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age.” Indeed, an appeal to authority is an inescapable and marvelously unavoidable element of Christian theology.

Evangelicals have, for decades, noted that evangelicalism is facing a crisis.¹⁹ According to many, the epicenter of this crisis is the issue of religious, biblical, and gospel authority. Francis Schaeffer was one of the first evangelicals to remark that several watershed issues had arisen within evangelicalism that demonstrated that the movement was in serious trouble.²⁰ At the very core of Schaeffer’s concern for evangelicalism was that evangelicals no longer maintained a concern for authoritative truth. Many critics argued that Schaeffer’s claim was too strong. However, several decades later, it is clear that Schaeffer certainly did not overstate his case, but, if possible,

¹⁶Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 127. Of course, for others it is the key attribute of the Bible they wish to deny.

¹⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 7.

¹⁸Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 464.

¹⁹See, John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody, 1996).

²⁰Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1984).

may have understated it. Perhaps the coming evangelical crisis that many have forewarned is already here.

It is not difficult to demonstrate that the evangelical tradition is grappling with an authority crisis. Much of evangelicalism is marred by a radical individualism and a plurality of theologies. Roman Catholic theologians have noted that this is the logical result of the Protestant Reformation, and that the proper alternative is an authoritative church.²¹

Therefore, in this age, what needs to be said about the authority of Scripture? It is the contention of this project that a theological formulation that synthesizes evangelical commitments concerning the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture is needed in the contemporary theological conversation. Specifically, how might the doctrine of the Trinity help evangelicals to develop a robust account of biblical authority?

It is not that evangelicals have not been making a strong case for biblical authority; they have. However, many of these accounts have not made full use of the trinitarian terminology that is made available to them through the Christian tradition. The division between the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity has not always existed. Kevin Vanhoozer calls this transition the “great reversal” of systematic theology.²² In his view, there was a time when Christian theologians became bored with the subject of theology itself, namely, the triune God. The great theological reversal to which he refers occurred when theologians began to think about God as the Supreme

²¹Robert Godfrey, “Martin Luther: An Evangelical Original,” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 61.

²²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse 1,” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Worship, Community*, ed. Daniel Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, n.d.), 29. Vanhoozer links the great reversal that occurred in systematic theology to the great reversal that also occurred in the area of hermeneutics. According to his account, the doctrine of Scripture, as well as practice of biblical interpretation, became separated in modernity from the doctrine and the activity of the triune God. Also, see

Being instead of the triune God revealed in Scripture.²³ Reflecting on theological terminology about the doctrine of God, Nicholas Lash notes, “Consideration of how the word ‘God’ goes, of the grammar of its usage, is of central concern to any tradition of theological investigation. And it would surely not be quite arbitrary to propose that consideration of the uses of ‘God’ is not to be counted *Christian* unless it includes some mention of, or reference to, the figure of Jesus.”²⁴ Therefore, in Christian theological usage, it is not necessarily enough to use the term “God.” The term must be defined in a way that is distinctly Christian.

Commenting on how the “great reversal” impacted evangelicalism, Vanhoozer maintains, “To some degree we are all heirs of this genetic mutation, this cancer, as it were, in the marrow of modern divinity: the tendency to be nominally but not operationally trinitarian.”²⁵ The doctrinal under-determination and mislocation of the idea of revelation can only be overcome by its reintegration into the comprehensive structure of Christian doctrine, and most especially the Christian doctrine of God.²⁶ Therefore, it is appropriate to consider how appealing to the triune God, who possesses all authority, might thicken an evangelical account of biblical authority.²⁷ Vanhoozer makes a similar

²³Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 41.

²⁴Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of “Religion”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 132.

²⁵Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse 1,” 30.

²⁶J. B. Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13. Webster believes that the most important consequence of this reintegration will be to call into question the idea that the doctrine of revelation is a tract of Christian teaching with quasi-defendant status. This calling into question of the idea will in turn offer the possibilities of an orderly exposition of revelation as a corollary of more primary Christian affirmations about the nature, purposes, and saving presence of the triune God.

²⁷For two works that propose a similar historical thesis as it relates to the life and theology of Jonathan Edwards, see Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), and William M. Schweitzer, *God Is a Communicative Being: Divine Communicativeness and Harmony in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

point, noting, “Because the God in whom Christians believe is Father, Son, and Spirit, one might think that the identity of this God would be relevant as we seek to understand the Bible as God’s Word.”²⁸

There may be no need more pressing than a dogmatic account of authority, an account that speaks to the ontology of Scripture: not only what it *does*, but what it *is*. Therefore, the challenge is not merely to speak more loudly to the issue of biblical authority, nor, is it to revise what the understanding of biblical authority in the midst of cultural challenges. Rather, the mission is to testify to the issue of biblical authority by relying on the internal resources of the Christian faith in ways that take into consideration the gracious revelatory work of the trinitarian God in history.

Thesis

This dissertation will argue that the Bible is authoritative because it has God the Father as its source, God the Son as the perfect Word that is spoken, and God the Spirit as its efficacious power. Scripture is authoritative because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all speak, with one voice, an authoritative Word. It will contend that the bible is authoritative because it is the triune God’s speech, which is to say, it carries the same authority as the triune God. It will argue, along with the Christian tradition, that there is a causal relationship between authorship and authority. However, this dissertation will further this common account of authority by appealing to the authorial agency of each person of the Godhead. Specifically, this dissertation will appeal to the modes of subsistence of each person of the Trinity to describe how the Father, Son and Spirit are each authoritative authors. God the Father, who is the source of all things, is the origin of the authoritative Word. God the Son, who is the authoritative content and mediator of the Father’s speech, continues to speak an authoritative Word as the ascended

²⁸Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse 1,” 32.

and eloquent King. God the Spirit, who breathes out the authoritative Word, brings about the authoritative intentions and effects of the Father and Son. Accordingly, in a trinitarian account of authority, an appeal is made not only to divine authorship, but specifically to trinitarian authorship.

This account will build on the claim that the Bible is authoritative because it is God's Word, which is certainly a true and faithful claim. Specifically, it will demonstrate that the authority of the Bible is best explained in relation to the authority of the Father, the authority of the Son, and the authority of the Spirit. In order to make this argument successfully, I will establish that contemporary evangelical accounts of scriptural authority, though accurate in appealing to the divine origin of Scripture, can be strengthened with an appeal to trinitarian communicative agency. Each chapter will include conversation partners from the broad evangelical tradition who will serve as demonstrations of modern-day accounts of scriptural authority. The soundings from evangelicalism will attempt not to be exhaustive but rather representative of the evangelical tradition as it relates to scriptural authority.

A Christian theology of revelation becomes dysfunctional when its bonds to the doctrine of the Trinity disintegrate. In their saving acts, which include biblical revelation, Father, Son, and Spirit do not show up as replacements or stand-ins for one another, but each brings about the saving presence and action of the others.²⁹ Dogmatic projects of biblical authority attempt to establish a clear and definite location where the created order can find truth, particularly truth about God. The dogmatic account presented here will locate this authority in the authoritative speech of the Trinity. A theological account of Scripture's authority cannot be isolated as an independent topic in

²⁹Kathryn Tanner, "The Trinity as Christian Teaching," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 352.

Christian doctrine, but must be located in the context of other Christian doctrinal affirmations about God's communicative activity.³⁰

Background

In order to proceed with this thesis it is essential to provide a brief historical account of the doctrine of biblical authority.³¹ The early church embraced the authority of Scripture because Scripture has God as its origin.³² As the Word of God given by the Spirit of God, Scripture had for the church fathers the status of a primary authority in the life, teaching, and mission of the church. Originating from God and enshrining the truth of God, it had, indeed, the authority of God himself.³³ Justin Martyr claimed that Scripture, "is to be believed for its own nobility and for the confidence due to him who sends it. Now the word of truth is sent from God. . . . For being sent with authority, it were not fit that it should be required to produce proof of what is said; since neither is there any proof beyond itself, which is God."³⁴ Likewise, Clement of Alexandria confessed, "The Scriptures which we believe are valid from their omnipotent authority."³⁵

³⁰Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), s.v. "Authority of Scripture," by J. B. Webster.

³¹This brief historical account is in no way intended to be comprehensive. This account is merely intended to demonstrate the general history of biblical authority in order to provide a context for the contemporary conversation.

³²Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 80.

³³Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 200.

³⁴Justin Martyr, "Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection," in *Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 1:294.

³⁵Clement of Alexandria, "Elucidations," in *Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2:409.

For the earliest Christians, the Bible was authoritative simply because it originates from the divine author.³⁶

Similarly, medieval theologians maintained this confession as they attributed the Holy Scripture to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The writers of Scripture had not spoken on their own authority, but with the authority of the “supreme Spirit,” according to Thomas Aquinas.³⁷ All major participants in late medieval debates recognized Holy Scripture as the principal authority in matters of doctrine.³⁸ One of the main theological issues for the church in the Middle Ages was the nature of interpretation. Eventually the issues of biblical authority and the church's role in authoritative interpretation became conflated. However, it should not be overlooked that even in the midst of a hermeneutical crisis, the church maintained that the Bible was its authority.

It was not until the Protestant Reformation that the issue of Scriptural authority became a major ecclesiastical controversy.³⁹ The main issue was the ground, or source, of such authority. According to the Catholic Church, authority was located in the Church and Scripture itself and in its apostolic tradition. Several centuries earlier, the Church had

³⁶For this and other helpful remarks on the inspiration and authority of Scripture, see Michael Graves, *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); John J. O’Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

³⁷For a very helpful discussion of the authority of Scripture in medieval theology, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, vol. 3 of *Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 40.

³⁸For a helpful narrative on the nature of biblical authority in the Middle Ages, see Ian Christopher Levy, *Holy Scripture and the Quest for Authority at the End of the Middle Ages* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). Levy argues that theologians were bound the divine truth in the Bible, yet the church possessed no absolute means of determining the final authoritative meaning of the biblical text—hence the range of appeals to antiquity, the papacy, and councils, none of which were ultimately conclusive.

³⁹For a comprehensive commentary on the issues of authority, revelation, and the biblical testimony during the Reformation, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 183–244, 304–21.

begun to teach that tradition itself, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, was equal in authority to Scripture. Similarly, it was the Church, according to Catholic tradition, that conferred authority on Scripture because it was the Church that birthed Scripture and determined its canon. Therefore, in Catholic theology the Church, not Scripture, belonged in the category of first principles, the foundation for faith. The Reformation reversed the Scripture-Church relationship by maintaining that the Bible alone is the first principle. The Reformers, with their emphasis on *sola scriptura*, confessed that Scripture is authoritative because it has God as its author. It was not that the Church conferred authority on Scripture, but Scripture is authoritative because it is God's Word that is self-attesting.⁴⁰

With the rise of modernity, the Bible's authority came under an intense scrutiny it had never faced before.⁴¹ The traditional assumptions about authority that existed in premodernity were seriously questioned. Deists such as Anthony Collins and Voltaire, and the German biblical critics J. S. Semler and J. G. Eichhorn, raised issues concerning the veracity of the text, which led to attacks on the inspiration and authority of the Bible.⁴² Commenting on the relentless attacks on biblical authority, Emil Bruner asserted, "In earlier days this discussion used to be cut short by saying briefly, 'It is written'; that is, with the aid of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Today we can no longer

⁴⁰For a helpful study on the authority of Scripture in the Reformed tradition, see Henk Van Den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2008); idem, "Heinrich Bullinger and Jean Calvin on the Authority of Scripture (1538-1571)," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 310–24; and Peter Opitz, "The Authority of Scripture in the Early Zurich Reformation (1522-1540)," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 296–309.

⁴¹For a helpful analysis on the relationship between the supposed death of God in the nineteenth century and the death of the author (and therefore authority) in the twentieth century, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 43–97. For other representative and recent accounts of the impact on the Enlightenment upon the Bible, see Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴²James C. Livingston et al., *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 2.

do this, even if we would.”⁴³ Friedrich Schleiermacher commented, “in order to attain the faith, we need no doctrine of Scripture.”⁴⁴

It is difficult to overstate the impact of modernity and Enlightenment principles on Christian theology. More than anything else, Enlightenment thought marked a revolt against authoritarianism and the emergence of individual reason and conscience as the primary arbiters of truth and action.⁴⁵ Pelikan notes, “The modern period in the history of Christian doctrine may be defined as the time when doctrines that had been assumed more than debated for most of Christian history were themselves called into question; the idea of revelation, the uniqueness of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the expectation of life after death, even the transcendence of God.”⁴⁶ In a number of ways, the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries amounted to a critique of external authority.⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant described the Enlightenment as follows:

Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of

⁴³Emil Bruner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, trans. Oliver Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1934), 323. In this and other works, Bruner substitutes the authority of Jesus Christ for the authority of Scripture. He states, “We believe in Christ not because Scripture, or the apostles, teach us about him in such a way, but we believe in the Scriptures because, and in so far as, they teach Christ. The authority of Scripture is not formal but material; Christ, the revelation. Even subjectively, however, this authority is not based upon the Scriptures as such, but upon the encounter of faith with the Christ of Scripture” (324).

⁴⁴Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 593.

⁴⁵Livingston et al., *Modern Christian Thought*, 6. In some sense every age has produced individuals who have challenged the accepted authorities of their day through the appeal to individual conscience. The Enlightenment is characterized by the spread of the spirit of autonomous reason to all people, not just intellectual elites. The term “autonomy” (*autos* self + *nomos* law) means “self-governed.” Autonomy is the release from humanity’s self-incurred tutelage – from the inability to draw conclusions that are not imposed from outside the self.

⁴⁶Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700)*, vol. 5 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), viii.

⁴⁷Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 204.

resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Dare to know!
“Have courage to use your own reason!”—that is the motto of enlightenment.⁴⁸

The Enlightenment encouraged humanity to escape from the bondage of tradition and tutors that have prohibited humanity’s progress through reason.

Inevitably, the Enlightenment’s critical stance toward handed-down truth had significant consequences for the concept of biblical authority. Scholars began to develop critical approaches to the Bible that viewed the Bible as any other text, not God’s authoritative revelation. The critical approach to biblical interpretation that began to dominate the modern study of the Bible sought to protect the Bible from what was thought to be dogmatic captivity to confessional and theological traditions. Biblical critics laid great emphasis on the presumed objectivity of their studies.⁴⁹ Modernity challenged Christian assumptions about the nature of the biblical text and its interpretation, calling the interpretation of Scripture *ex ipsius historia* (out of its own history).⁵⁰ Thus, in modernity, to speak of Scripture as an ontological category is to speak of a natural text. The field of historical criticism was characterized by a hermeneutic of suspicion, as well as a search for meaning behind the text rather than in the text itself.⁵¹ Thus, the scientific interpretive task became more authoritative than the Word of God itself. The authority of the Christian faith was relocated in the modern era to the objective interpreter; it moved from the author to the reader.

With the rise of postmodernity and its critiques of the Enlightenment project, biblical scholars became increasingly aware of their own historical situatedness.

⁴⁸Immanuel Kant, “Answering the Question: What Is the Enlightenment,” ed. Friedrich Gedike and Johann Beister, *Berlin Monthly*, December 1784, 2.

⁴⁹David Tracy and Robert McQueen Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 129.

⁵⁰Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan I. Israel and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97–117.

⁵¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), s.v. “Historical Criticism,” by Richard E. Burnett..

Postmodernity contends that instead of asking *what a text means*, we should more truthfully ask *what it means to me*, or, perhaps, *what we will it to mean*.⁵² Therefore, in the postmodern mindset, if all words are historically conditioned, and if all readings are ideologically conditioned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to believe in an authoritative Word from God.⁵³ As it relates to biblical interpretation, the postmodern challenge proposes that there are no independent standards and no universal criteria for determining which of the many rival interpretations is the right one.⁵⁴ In light of the modern and postmodern projects, it is not an exaggeration to say that Christianity has experienced a crisis of authority.⁵⁵

Matters that related to metaphysics, epistemology, and hermeneutics had significant influence on what the Bible was understood to be. As a result of the radical shifts in metaphysics and epistemology that came in the wake of modernity and postmodernity, bibliography experienced radical shifts in its dogmatic location and definition.⁵⁶ The comprehensive reworking of the origin and nature of the Bible resulted in a confusion of ontology, a misunderstanding of what the Bible is: the Word of God. Perhaps no doctrine of Scripture was more greatly altered than the doctrine of authority.

⁵²T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), s.v. “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” by Kevin J. Vanhoozer.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., introduction to the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 21.

⁵⁵For an in-depth study of the crisis of authority as it relates to American Evangelicalism, see Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nathan O. Hatch, “The Crisis of Authority in Popular Culture,” in *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 17–46.

⁵⁶Commenting on the radical shifts that took place in the domain of theology, Vanhoozer notes that two doctrinal roads emerged from the Enlightenment—two ways of speaking about God. First, there was the traditional trinitarian grammar, and second emerged the philosophical concept of the Supreme Being, the one God. Vanhoozer argues that systematicians began to lose interest in theology but rather that they lost the subject matter—the triune God of the Christian faith. See Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse 1,” 29.

The theological heirs of modernism and postmodernism began to speak of the authority of Scripture in terms that were previously foreign to the doctrine.⁵⁷

The response to the challenge to biblical authority, particularly in the evangelical tradition, has been strong and, at the same time, diverse.⁵⁸ In the twentieth century, stalwart Protestant theologian Carl F. H. Henry penned his six-volume *magnum opus*, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, which he completed in 1983. Henry contended, “The Scriptures are the authoritative written record and interpretation of God’s revelatory deeds, and the ongoing source of reliable objective knowledge concerning God’s nature and ways.”⁵⁹ A few years earlier, in 1979, Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim took a different line of argumentation. They maintained that the Bible has authority over matters of faith and practice such as imperatives for conduct, church organization, and the articles of faith, but isn’t necessarily reliable in its reportage of historical events and scientific facts.⁶⁰ Furthermore, according to their thesis, the theological tradition of inerrancy was a nineteenth-century innovation. Their work was an effort to set the record straight, to convince evangelicals that God has accommodated himself to their human weakness and limited capacity to understand. However, they were convinced that their proposal did not

⁵⁷J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 91.

⁵⁸The following account of biblical authority within the tradition of evangelicalism is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, my intention is to present representative voices of various positions within evangelicalism on the topic of biblical authority. Perhaps the quintessential Protestant account of biblical authority came from Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield in his magisterial work *Inspiration and Authority*. Warfield, discussing Scripture’s authority, appeals to the divine origin of Scripture. He argues, “the 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.” See Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1980), 280.

⁵⁹Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows*. For Henry, “The Scriptures offer a comprehensive and authoritative overview of God’s revelatory disclosure and publish his purpose in the past, present and future.” Ibid.

⁶⁰Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

detract from biblical authority, but rather returned to the original understanding of scriptural authority.

In response to the Rogers/McKim thesis, John Woodbridge argued for the traditional evangelical concepts of inerrancy and authority.⁶¹ In light of their proposal, he maintained that

the Bible is God's sure Word to humankind. It was His Word for yesterday; it is for today, and it will be for tomorrow. God, the Holy Spirit makes it a living Word to us. Each day Bible believers in this country and elsewhere have drawn strength and comfort from the living, written Word, which speaks of another living Word, Christ. For them, biblical authority is not an abstract concept; they have experienced its life-changing and life-shaping implications firsthand.⁶²

Woodbridge demonstrated that the Rogers/McKim thesis was not only flawed historically, but even more importantly, theologically.⁶³

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (hereafter CSBI) is one of the strongest and clearest affirmations of the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture. Written in 1978, the statement affirms that God, the author of Scripture, only speaks truth and has spoken truth in the inspiration of Scripture. Therefore, "Scripture is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction in all that affirms; obeyed, as God's command, and all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, and all their promises."

N. T. Wright sets another course, commenting that the evangelical tradition has largely misunderstood what is meant by the authority of Scripture. He argues that scriptural authority is better understood as "God's authority being *exercised through* Scripture."⁶⁴ Indeed, "Scripture's own view of authority focuses on the authority of God

⁶¹John D Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁶²*Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³Another helpful work is D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

⁶⁴N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the*

himself.”⁶⁵ Therefore, it seems that for Wright, the Bible does not possess anything that would make it ontologically authoritative; rather, God, who possesses all authority, exercises that authority in and through Scripture. According to Wright, this means that, “the authority of Scripture is most truly put into operation as the church goes to work in the world on behalf of the gospel, the good news that in Jesus Christ the living God has defeated the powers of evil and begun the work of new creation. It is with the Bible in its hand, its head and its heart — not merely with the newspaper in the latest political fashion or scheme — that the church can go to work in the world.”⁶⁶ For Wright, it seems that the phrase, “authority of Scripture” is not used to make an ontological claim about what the Bible is, but, is merely a claim about how God uses the Scripture to transform the church and the world.

Peter Enns, is perhaps best known for his book *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*.⁶⁷ Enns’ primary purpose in this work is “to bring an evangelical doctrine of Scripture into conversation with the implications generated by some important themes in modern biblical scholarship—particularly the Old Testament—over the past 150 years.”⁶⁸ In this work, Enns puts forth the concept he calls the “incarnational analogy,” that Christ’s incarnation is analogous to Scripture’s inscripturation.⁶⁹ Enns elaborates,

For God to speak at a certain time and place — he enters their world. He speaks and acts in ways that make sense to them. This is surely what it means for God to reveal

Authority of Scripture (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 25.

⁶⁵N. T. Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (January 1, 1991): 14.

⁶⁶Wright, *The Last Word*, 115.

⁶⁷Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

himself to people — he accommodates, condescends, meets them where they are. The phrase word of God does not imply disconnectedness to its environment. In fact, if we can learn a lesson from the incarnation of God in Christ, it demands the exact opposite.⁷⁰

For Enns, for God to reveal himself means that he accommodates himself.⁷¹ Enns' theological proposal is meant to show that the Word of God is not meant to be kept safe from the vicissitudes of human history. Rather, for the Bible to be God's Word implies that it would be an accommodated revelation.⁷²

Stanley Grenz maintains a thoroughly Spirit-centered approach to biblical authority. In his systematic theology, he affirms that the Bible is the sole authority and is authoritative in all of life.⁷³ He further confesses that Scripture must saturate all of life, that Christians must place themselves under the teaching of the Bible and commit themselves to a confessing biblical worldview.⁷⁴ However, Grenz's understanding of biblical authority, specifically the Spirit's work, in *Beyond Foundationalism*, a book he wrote with John Franke, came under criticism from some evangelicals.⁷⁵ Grenz proposes that the Bible is the Spirit's instrument for making God known, however, it is not to be understood as revelation itself.

Each of the previous accounts, in some way, represents a different strand of the evangelical tradition as it relates to biblical authority. While most, if not all, of these theological projects provide some valuable insight into the nature of biblical authority, ultimately they have neglected to provide a thoroughly trinitarian account of authority.⁷⁶

⁷⁰Ibid., 56.

⁷¹Ibid., 109.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 403.

⁷⁴Ibid., 404.

⁷⁵Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

⁷⁶Other recent works on biblical authority worth mentioning in the evangelical tradition include William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (New York: Oxford University

A robust and dynamic account of biblical authority maintains that the authority of Scripture is nothing less than the authority of God himself, the authority of the triune God. When the Bible speaks, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit speak.

Methodology

As a project in systematic theology, this dissertation uses exegetical, historical, and dogmatic resources in seeking to build a consistent view of God's triune communicative action in his authoritative Word. It looks primarily to the internal resources of the Christian faith in order to argue the thesis by making use of the Bible's internal testimony and the rich Christian tradition provided by historical theology. This project, therefore, is exegetical, historical, and dogmatic. The thesis relies heavily on the pro-Nicene Trinitarian tradition as well as the traditional account of providence and biblical inspiration.

Press, 1981); Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Charles R. Blaisdell, ed., *Conservative, Moderate, Liberal: The Biblical Authority Debate* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1991); Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Carson and Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*; D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005); David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1978); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010); Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Donald Miller, *The Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Clark H. Pinnock and Barry Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Deerfield, IL: IVP Academic, 2013); Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2002).

A significant portion of this dissertation is constructive – putting together an evangelical account of trinitarian biblical authority. However, in order to demonstrate the value of such an account, it also engages several conversation partners, all of whom will come from the broad evangelical tradition. The goal of this interaction is to demonstrate how these accounts might benefit from an explicit trinitarian account of biblical authority and to demonstrate the superiority of such a trinitarian account to typical evangelical approaches to biblical authority.

What follows is a brief summary of chapters 2 through 5. Chapter 2 argues that Scripture is authoritative because of its divine origin, the unbegotten Father. As has already been indicated, most Protestants appeal to the Spirit as the ultimate divine origin of the Bible. In order to demonstrate the need for this distinction, I examine two evangelical sources that could benefit from this trinitarian distinction: *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* and A. T. B. McGowan's work, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*.⁷⁷ The CSBI and *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* are two important theological proposals that, in different ways, consider the theological implications of the divine origin of Scripture. After each proposal has been considered, this chapter presents the dogmatic implications of the unbegotten Father on an account of biblical authority as well as the Scriptural witness of John 7:14–24, John 12:44–50, and Hebrews 1:1–2. In light of the dogmatic and exegetical evidence, both proposals are taken into consideration in an effort to analyze how their understandings of divine authorship impact their understandings of biblical authority, and how each proposal could be strengthened with an appeal to triune communicative agency, which will in consequence demonstrate itself to be a superior position.

⁷⁷A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007).

The third chapter will argue that the Bible is authoritative because the Son is both the authoritative mediatorial *agent* through whom the Father speaks and at the same time the authoritative *content* of the Father's speech. The Word that is spoken by the Father is authoritative because it is the perfect revelatory Word, and that Word is always spoken through the mediatorial agency of the Son. A typical evangelical defense of Scripture's authority will attempt to appeal to the truthfulness and veracity of the text. While this is a right, noble, and virtuous task, I will suggest that it is premature. Evangelicals should first appeal to the ontology and nature of the Word that the Father speaks. It is not new to explore the relationship between God's incarnate Word and his inscripturated Word. In recent years, there have been several theological formulations that have examined this relationship.⁷⁸ These accounts of Scripture consider the implications of Christ's incarnation for divine inspiration/inscripturation. In their view, Scripture is thoroughly human and thus, fallible. Specifically, Peter Enns' work *Inspiration and Incarnation* and Kenton Sparks' work *God's Word in Human Words* will be analyzed in this chapter.⁷⁹ The specific texts that will be explored are John 5:19-26; 8:25-29; 14:8-11; and Revelation 1:1-3. These texts will demonstrate that the communicative agency of the Son is directly related to the authorial agency of the Father. The Son is the content and mediator of the Father's speech.

The fourth chapter will argue that the Bible is authoritative because it is breathed out by the Spirit who, being spoken by the Father and Son, is the authorial agent who brings about the divine intentions and effects of the triune God. In inspiration, the

⁷⁸These accounts have drawn analogies between the incarnate Word and the inscripturated Word by pointing out the human nature of the Bible. This incarnational model of Scripture argues that God, in his condescension and accommodation to humanity, gave humanity a thoroughly human book.

⁷⁹Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*; Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); idem, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Spirit speaks the Word of the Father and Son. The chief work of the Spirit in illuminating Scripture is to point back to the perfect Word that was spoken by the Father and the Son. The two conversation partners in this chapter are N. T. Wright and Stanley Grenz. Each of these theologians presents a unique view of the relationship between pneumatology and biblical authority. This chapter will demonstrate that an evangelical understanding of scriptural authority begins with the confession that the human authors of Scripture were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.” I will further argue that an evangelical understanding of scriptural authority, as it relates to the work of the Spirit, does not terminate with the writing of Scripture, but carries on as the Spirit continues to speak Scripture. Indeed the Spirit participates in triune communicative activity by speaking the Word of the Father and Son. The specific biblical texts that I examine are John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:12-14, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, 2 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:16-21. These biblical texts will establish the relationship of the work of the Spirit to the authority of Scripture. After examining the biblical texts this dissertation will study the relationship between the Spirit’s work and authorial efficacy, the Spirit’s work of illumination and Christian interpretation, and finally the work of the Spirit and Christian theological witness. As it relates to the authority of Scripture, the Spirit shares in the authoritative communicative activity of both the Father and the Son. It is the Spirit who efficaciously applies the authoritative Word that is spoken by the Father.

The fifth chapter will summarize the argument by demonstrating that Scripture is authoritative not only because it is God’s Word, but more dynamically, because it is the trinitarian God’s Word. The Bible, as the consummate trinitarian text, is authoritative because it has God the Father as its source, God the Son as the content and mediator of the Father’s speech, and God the Spirit as the authorial agent who completes the divine authorial intentions of the triune God. The Bible is authoritative because it is God’s communicative activity through which the triune God speaks. In Scripture, the Father

speaks his Word, which is the eternally authoritative Word about and mediated by the Son, and which is completed and brought to its full intention by the efficacious work of the Spirit. A trinitarian account of Scripture claims that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all speak, with one voice, an authoritative Word. Related to this conclusion, several theological and pastoral implications will be explored that relates to the life and practices of the church.

CHAPTER 2

THE UNBEGOTTEN FATHER AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

This dissertation is an attempt to give an account for the authority of Scripture that is rooted in its divine authorship, specifically its triune authorship. This chapter argues that Scripture is authoritative because of its divine origin, the unbegotten Father. As has already been indicated, most Protestants appeal to the Spirit as the ultimate divine origin of the Bible. Though the traditional account that appeals to the work of the Spirit is in no way inaccurate, an appeal to the unbegotten Father, who speaks an authoritative Word by the power of the Spirit, provides a more robust account of biblical authority. This chapter considers how an account of trinitarian communicative agency speaks of the authorial agency of the Father. In other words, this account proposes that when the Bible speaks, God the Father speaks.

In order to demonstrate the significance of the Father's authorship for biblical authority, this chapter first explores two representative accounts of biblical authority from the evangelical tradition in order to investigate how the Christian tradition, specifically in evangelical theology, has appropriated authoritative action of divine persons. Second, this chapter presents a dogmatic account of two characteristics that are unique to the Father: paternity and unbegottenness. The Father's paternity is examined, making special mention of how his mode of subsistence relates to the Father being an author. Also, the unbegotten nature of the Father is taken into consideration in order to demonstrate how an appeal to the unbegottenness of the Father provides strength to an account of biblical authority. Third, this chapter investigates various biblical texts that appropriate authority to God the Father. The exegetical exercise gives an account for three biblical texts,

namely, John 7:14–24, John 12:44–50, and Hebrews 1:1–2. Fourth, this chapter concludes by presenting a theological account of biblical authority that understands God the Father to be the ultimate origin of the biblical text.

The Authority of Scripture and Divine Authorship: Soundings from Evangelicalism

One priority of this dissertation is to demonstrate how, for better or for worse, contemporary evangelicals have appropriated the doctrine of God for the doctrine of biblical authority. As has already been mentioned, the doctrine of biblical revelation is inextricably linked to the doctrine of God.¹ Evangelical theology has long appealed to this doctrinal relationship when formulating accounts for biblical inspiration, authority, inerrancy, canonicity, sufficiency, and clarity.

In this chapter two evangelical sources will be described, focusing specifically on how each appeals to the doctrine of God in its account of biblical authority. The two sources that will be considered are the CSBI and A. T. B. McGowan's work, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*.² Both of these accounts, though very different, make use of the doctrine of God in their doctrine of Scripture.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

The first theological formulation that will be examined is the CSBI. The doctrinal clarity of the inspiration and authority of the Bible in evangelical theology is perhaps not evidenced more clearly anywhere else than in the CSBI. The CSBI was

¹See David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999). Kelsey, in this work, is not particularly interested with how theologians have formulated the doctrine of biblical authority, but rather with how they actually use Scripture (and God) to authorize and validate their theological proposals.

²It is not the assumption of this dissertation that these two sources are exhaustive representations of the evangelical tradition on this point, but they do faithfully represent many evangelical theologies of biblical authority.

signed by nearly 300 noted evangelical scholars and was largely considered a success among evangelicals because it was one of the first formal statements on the inspiration and authority of the Bible in the history of the church.³ In what follows, I will briefly outline exactly what the statement says about biblical authority as it relates to the divine origin of Scripture, the authorship of the Holy Spirit, God's use of Scripture, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, and the Father-Son relationship.

Divine Origin of Scripture

The preface of the CSBI maintains that a confession of biblical authority is essential to Christian discipleship, declaring, "those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word." Consequently, it is not an exaggeration to state that to obey God's Word is to obey God. It further states, "To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority." For the CSBI, to obey Scripture is to obey God because Scripture originates from God. True Christian faith, according to the CSBI, is characterized by acknowledging and submitting to God's authoritative Word because he is its author.

In the short statement the CSBI reads, "God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself." This statement is a clear affirmation that God is the author of Scripture. It is also strong confirmation that God cannot lie and by his nature must speak truth. Since Scripture is God's speech about, and witness to, himself, it must therefore be

³The signers included James Montgomery Boice, Norman L. Geisler, John Gerstner, Carl F. H. Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, John Warwick Montgomery, Roger Nicole, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and John Wenham, among others.

reliable and truthful.

The CSBI continues to comment on the divine origin of Scripture in the affirmations and denials. Article I affirms “that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.” This affirmation makes clear that the Scripture is to be understood as God’s speech; he is its origin. “The initial article of the Chicago Statement is designed to establish the degree of authority that is to be attributed to the Bible, notes Sproul in his commentary on the CSBI.⁴ Because of its authoritative origination, Scripture is the *norma normans* (the norming norm), serving as the *Regula Fidei* (Rule of Faith) for the evangelical tradition. It is the rule by which everything else comes under judgment, because it is God’s Word. Therefore, Article I denies “that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.” Consequently, Scripture does not receive authority from any created thing, but is authoritative in itself because of its divine origin.

Article III affirms that “the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.” This affirmation defines the ontology of the whole corpus of Scripture as God’s Word; the entire canon is God’s Word. Therefore, a written work is canonical if it is inspired by God because, if it is inspired by God, then it exists as a Word from God, and every Word of God is authoritative for the church. Furthermore, Article III denies that “the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.” In this denial the CSBI disallows any definition of inspiration and authority that neglects to attribute the text of Scripture itself as divine revelation. Therefore, Article III, in its affirmation and denial, explains that the Bible is itself divine revelation. Sproul notes that Article III denies a, “disjunction between the revelation that is given to us in the person of Christ objectively and the

⁴R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy* (Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980), 25.

revelation that comes to us in equally objective terms in the Word of God inscripturated. Here the Bible is seen not merely as a catalyst for revelation, but as revelation itself.”⁵ According to the CSBI the Bible is authoritative because it proceeds from God and must therefore be seen as divine revelation. The CSBI concludes with a simple and powerful statement concerning the divine origin of Scripture, affirming, “what Scripture says, God says.” According to the CSBI the Bible is authoritative because it comes from God himself.

The Authorship of the Holy Spirit

The CSBI does not merely affirm that the Bible originates with God, but it ascribes authorship specifically to the Holy Spirit and to human authors. The short statement maintains, “Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.” The CSBI, then indicates that while the Bible originates with God, specifically the Holy Spirit, it is also written by human authors.

Article VII expands on the authorial agency of the Spirit by explaining, “inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.” Though this article is primarily interested in affirming the human authorship of Scripture, it also addresses the authorial agency of the Spirit. This particular affirmation is very important for understanding the relationship between the divine origin of Scripture, the authorship of the Holy Spirit, and biblical authority. Scripture’s divine origin is specifically linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. The

⁵Ibid., 29.

authorial agency of the Father and the Son is not mentioned, while the authorial agency of the Spirit is specified.

Article VII elaborates further by denying “that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.” Therefore, the CSBI understands the inspiration of Scripture, not to be the result of human insight, spiritual ecstasy, religious experience, or enlightenment, but the superintending work of God the Holy Spirit.

God’s Use of Scripture

The CSBI also develops the implications of the authoritative function of the Bible in relation to other theological documents. Article II affirms “that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.” This affirmation provides a description of how God uses the Bible, namely, to bind the conscience of his church. Article II is interested in promoting the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. This description, therefore, makes the case that God is providentially using his Word in the economy of salvation to reveal and redeem. Since the Scripture is the norm that God uses to bind the conscience of his church, other sources of theology do not have the same authoritative power as his Word.⁶ The Bible is sufficient. Further, Article II denies “that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.” Sproul comments,

the thrust of this article is to indicate that whatever lesser authorities there are, they never carry with them the authority of God Himself. There is a sense in which all authority in this world is derived and dependent upon the authority of God. God and God alone has intrinsic authority. That intrinsic authority is the authority given to the Bible since it is God’s Word.

⁶The CSBI does not deny the normative authority of creeds, councils, and confessions. Documents such as these have functional authority in specific denominations and organizations in particular contexts. *Ibid.*, 27.

Therefore, the Bible is the supreme authority and it is the authority through which all subordinate authorities must regulate themselves.

The Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit

The short statement provides details on the Spirit's work as the author and authenticator of Scripture, which says "The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning. Therefore, as divine author, the Spirit authenticates God's Word and illuminates it for the reader." The Spirit authenticates Scripture by persuading and assuring the church of the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture by bearing witness to the Word.

Article XVII affirms that "the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word." It is God's Spirit who convinces us that the Bible is God's word. The truth of the Scripture does not rest on external evidences, but the Spirit himself bears witness that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God. Sproul comments that the internal witness of the Spirit is, "God himself confirming the truthfulness of his own Word."⁷ Article XVII denies, "that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture," because God's revelatory purposes are united, and one cannot pit the Word of God against the Spirit of God, nor separate the two. The Holy Spirit works in concert with the Scripture as he speaks through Scripture and never against or contrary to Scripture. Therefore, the CSBI maintains reciprocity between the Word and Spirit and they are never to be set over against each other.

The Father-Son Relationship

⁷Ibid., 57.

Specifically addressing the general concept of authority as it relates to the person and work of Christ, the short statement reads, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God’s communication to man, as He is of all God’s gifts of grace.” As for the Father-Son relationship, “Holy Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is—the witness of the Father to the Incarnate Son.” This is the first instance in the document that alludes to trinitarian relations. Further, the statement reads, “By authenticating each other’s authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.” While this formulation takes advantage of trinitarian language it fails to discuss the nature of triune communicative activity. Specifically, there is no mention of how trinitarian relations, or how the subsistence of each person, determines the authorial agency of each person and how the authorial agency of each person contributes to an account of biblical authority.

The CSBI is a strong and consistent document that confesses the Bible’s authority and inerrancy in its preface, brief statement, affirmations and denials, and exposition. For the CSBI, what the Bible says, God says. Despite the strength and truthfulness of this theological treatise, is it possible that it might be buttressed? Does the CSBI assume too much about the nature and operations of the triune God? Would an appeal to triune communicative activity — activity that originates from God the Father, through God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit — provide a distinctly Christian theological witness that relies heavily on the internal resources of the Christian faith? Theological questions such as these will be addressed in subsequent sections. It is important first to consider one more evangelical theological proposal on the topic of biblical authority.

Andrew McGowan

Andrew McGowan is minister of Inverness East Church of Scotland and Professor of Theology in the University of the Highlands. McGowan's work *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage*, though trying to accomplish a similar goal as the CSBI, contains an entirely different proposal than that of CSBI. While the CSBI proposes to defend and promote the doctrine of inerrancy on the basis of the doctrine of God, McGowan sets out to deconstruct the doctrine of inerrancy, which, according to him, has been influenced by rationalistic assumptions. He hopes to replace the doctrine of inerrancy with a doctrine of infallibility, which is more accurately based on the doctrine of God, specifically spiration.

His stated purpose is "to contribute to discussions about the nature and function of Scripture in evangelical Christianity."⁸ He believes that by reconsidering the relationship between God and Scripture will result in a renewed and theological plausible doctrine of Scripture, that more closely reflects the text itself, not philosophical and logical categories imported onto the text. This project will consider two major proposals from McGowan: a reconsideration of the *locus* of Scripture and a reconsideration of the vocabulary of Scripture. Each of these two proposals shape and form McGowan's argument for infallibility and divine spiration.

Reconsidering the locus of Scripture. Though there are several aspects to McGowan's proposal, he begins by arguing that the doctrine of Scripture should be relocated in the evangelical theological system to the doctrine of God, and even more specifically, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. McGowan maintains that "For a long time now it is been taken for granted that Scripture comes at the beginning of a theological system."⁹ He further contends, "the doctrine of Scripture should be relocated, in order to

⁸A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 9.

⁹Ibid., 12. For an analysis on the Reformed and Scholastic tradition on this point, see Richard

emphasize that it is an aspect of God's self-revelation. Hence the doctrine of Scripture should be moved to its true theological *locus* within the doctrine of God, more precisely as an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰

McGowan's proposal of reconstruction follows two main points. First, the doctrine of Scripture must be set in context of God's self-revelation. Second, the doctrine of Scripture must be viewed as an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit, and the pneumatological focus requires us to relocate the doctrine of Scripture within that theological *locus*. Each of his two main points will be considered in order.

First, for McGowan, what does it mean that the doctrine of Scripture should be set in context of God's self-revelation? He means, "that the God who has eternally existed in Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has chosen to make himself known to the human beings he has created in his own image."¹¹ God discloses himself to his image bearers, and the doctrine of Scripture belongs within this framework. To reverse the order, or fail to separate the doctrine of God and Scripture is a theological disaster.

Further, he asserts, "we must not make the mistake of imagining that revelation is simply the communication of information, as if God used prophets and apostles to communicate certain facts that human beings need to know."¹² Rather, according to McGowan, "we must view revelation as part of the overall plan and purpose of God whereby he acts to save his people."¹³ McGowan sees Scripture, God's self-revelation to his image bearers, not merely as informative for them, but also transformative of them.

A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Scripture*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 96–117.

¹⁰McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 12.

¹¹Ibid., 17.

¹²Ibid., 20.

¹³Ibid.

Therefore, for McGowan, revelation is purposive in God's saving fellowship. At this point he relies on the work of John Webster, who argues, "revelation is the self-presentation of the triune God, the free work of sovereign mercy in which God wills, establishes and perfects saving fellowship with himself in which humankind comes to know, love, and fear him above all things."¹⁴ In short, for McGowan, following Webster, revelation is reconciliation. Therefore, McGowan asserts,

When we attempt to define Scripture, then, we must do so in the context of the self-revelation of God. But in what does the self-revelation consist? Historically, God's self-revelation originates in the very beginning, when he speaks to our first parents, whom he made in his own image. After all, God's self-revelation is directed towards an elect people for whom would ultimately come the Messiah. Then, with the incarnation, God's self-revelation comes to believers in Christ and in the witness to him. Theologically, God's self-revelation is centered upon Jesus Christ, was himself God incarnate and in him therefore all of the Godhead lives in bodily form.¹⁵

Scripture, then, is now serving as the revelatory presence of God, as God brings people into relationship with him through the power of the Spirit. McGowan further notes that revelation is not simply abstract ideas that bridge the gap from the noetic effects of sin, but revelation is also moral and relational.¹⁶ Furthermore,

In the context of describing the self-revelation of God, we may say that the Scriptures are the record of the revelation that God has given to his church, often written down long after the revelatory events they describe but used of God to bring that revelation afresh to every generation. The Scriptures are vital to the life of the church. They are God's Word to us. They have come into existence supernaturally, through a dual authorship of God in human writers and are entirely trustworthy. The Scriptures do not deceive us and infallibly achieve the purposes for which God has given them.¹⁷

Therefore, for McGowan, the Scriptures can be trusted to accomplish the purpose that God has given them, which seems to speak more to God's providential use of self-

¹⁴J. B. Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

¹⁵McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 21.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

revelation, than revelation itself.

Second, McGowan's proposal calls for a reconsideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. According to McGowan, despite the resurgence of pneumatology, attributable in large part due to Pentecostal theology, Western academic theology has largely failed to give its attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He believes this is largely due to the impact of rationalism and secularism on Western Christianity. He maintains that not only has the rationalistic and secular assumptions of the West affected those who wish to "demythologize" Scripture, but also those who affirm the supernatural nature of the Scripture. According to McGowan, there are two likely reasons for the somewhat negative approach to the supernatural and to spiritual powers. First, some evangelicals are determined to present themselves within the academy as intellectuals, which can hardly be done when one's work emphasizes the spiritual and supernatural. Second, some evangelicals tried to articulate their position in contrast to fringe Pentecostalism and charismatic movements and have thus been hesitant to say too much about the Holy Spirit, lest they be regarded as having abandoned their secessionist position.¹⁸

Repudiating this development, McGowan calls for "a renewed emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit," which in turn, "will affect our doctrine of Scripture."¹⁹ Furthermore, he believes that this renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit will prompt us to relocate the doctrine of Scripture into the doctrine of God, specifically the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ He argues that we must consider the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in any discussion of Scripture, because "if a supernatural being (God) has chosen to reveal himself to humanity by his Spirit through his Word (living, written, preached),

¹⁸Ibid., 23.

¹⁹Ibid., 24.

²⁰Ibid., 25.

then we cannot continue to take seriously any doctrine of Scripture that has been constructed in order to conform to the structures of modernity.”²¹

In his discussion of Scripture and the Holy Spirit, McGowan appeals to 2 Peter 1:20-21: “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”²² For McGowan, Peter is testifying to the divine origin of the Bible, which is the work of God the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the writing of Scripture, ought to be seen as an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit, and this ought to be reflected in the place Scripture is given in a theological formulations.²³ Therefore, for McGowan,

Scripture ought not to be placed at the beginning of the theological system, to provide an epistemological basis for what follows, but rather ought to be placed under the doctrine of God — more specifically under the work of the Holy Spirit. The rationale for this argument concerns the nature of Scripture itself, as part of God’s self-revelation. Thus theology proper begins with God, not with the Scriptures. It is God himself who brought the Scriptures into existence. How then can his writings have a logical or theological priority over the God who caused them to be written?²⁴

He further argues,

Within the structure of systematic theology, the doctrine of Scripture might be expressed as follows. First, we speak of God as self-existent being noting the Creator-creature distinction. Second we speak of God’s self-revelation, as in Hebrews 1, noting that the first of all he spoke to the prophets and apostles but supremely in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. Then third, we go on to speak of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the agent of the self-revelation, both in terms of Jesus Christ himself and of the Scriptures.²⁵

It is here that McGowan makes his case for restructuring the *locus* of Scripture.

²¹Ibid., 24.

²²Second Peter 1:20-21 will receive an exegetical treatment in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

²³McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 29.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 30.

Ultimately, his thesis appeals to the categories and order of systematic theology, arguing the doctrine of God should be considered as the first, *a priori*, category, a matter of first principle. According to his account Scripture should be encompassed within the Creator/creature distinction, the incarnation, and pneumatology. Only then should we give a systematic account of biblical authority that is informed by the doctrine of God.

Reconsidering the Vocabulary of Scripture

In light of reconsidering the *locus* of Scripture, McGowan maintains that the vocabulary of Scripture should also be reconsidered. In fact, by reconsidering the *locus* of Scripture, it is necessary to reconsider the vocabulary that we attribute to the doctrine of Scripture. This section of his proposal has four components related to pneumatology. McGowan contends that the Holy Spirit: (1) is the divine origin of the Scriptures (divine spiration); (2) enables people to identify Scripture as the Word of God (recognition); (3) gives understanding, meaning, and significance (comprehension); (4) affirms the truth and authority of the Scriptures (infallibility).²⁶ For McGowan, the traditional categories of inspiration, illumination, perspicuity, and inerrancy do not accurately describe the work of the Spirit, or, what Scripture is. He believes that placing the doctrine of Scripture into the *locus* of pneumatology will result in a more accurate description of these categories.

First, McGowan argues that the word “inspiration” is a problematic translation of 2 Timothy 3:16. He says that, θεόπνευστος should not be translated “inspired,” but rather “God-breathed.”²⁷ He also maintains that in modern usage, “inspiration” too often

²⁶Ibid., 38.

²⁷According to McGowan, “Since the publication in 1611 of the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, the most famous and enduring of the English translations, the word ‘inspiration’ has generally been used as a translation of the Greek θεόπνευστος, found in 2 Timothy 3:16. The English word ‘inspiration’ is drawn from the Latin word *inspirato*, which was used in the Vulgate translation of the 2 Timothy passage.” Furthermore, “Inspiration has also become a standard term in theological discussions regarding Scripture. It is very difficult to dislodge a word that has so embedded itself in a theological

refers to a heightened spiritual state and causes confusion when used theologically. He contends that we should cease to use the word “inspiration,” both on exegetical grounds and because of the confusion that arises through modern English usage of the word. He contends that we should instead opt for language of divine spiration. He defines divine spiration as “the affirmation that at certain times in certain places, God the Holy Spirit caused men to write books and his supervisory action was such that although these books are actually the work of human beings, they are also the word of God.”²⁸ Divine spiration, according to McGowan, more accurately reflects the divine spiration that characterizes the person of the Spirit. McGowan believes that this new terminology will help evangelicals to avoid a major misunderstanding. Rather than arguing that the biblical text is itself ontologically authoritative, evangelicals should rather understand that Scripture is the authority of God speaking through Scripture. He claims, “It is better to reside the authority in God rather than the Scriptures themselves. We might speak, then, of the authority of God speaking by his Spirit in and through the Scriptures.”²⁹ Therefore, McGowan asserts that the Bible is only functionally authoritative as the Spirit reveals God through Scripture.

Second, McGowan maintains that we should replace the word “illumination” with “recognition.” He argues that the word “illumination” has been used in such a way as to imply that the Scriptures need to have light shed on them before they can be understood.³⁰ He points out, however, “the problem is in the human mind and not in the

language and has been invested with such theological content, but the word is problematic and an attempt must be made to do so” (ibid., 39). The translation of θεόπνευστος will be discussed further in chapter four of this dissertation.

²⁸Ibid., 43.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 44. This is certainly not the way illumination has been defined by the Protestant tradition. For examples, Calvin argues, “For the Lord has so knit together the certainty of his word and his Spirit, that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us there to behold the face of God; and, on the other hand, we embrace the Spirit with no danger of

Scriptures. The Scriptures do not need to be illuminated, rather the human mind, which is been damaged by the noetic effects of sin.”³¹ Therefore, according to McGowan, one can only believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God when the Holy Spirit enables us to “recognize” the Scripture as the word of God.³² McGowan maintains that by using the term recognition the object of the Spirit’s work is the mind of the reader, not the Scripture itself, something he believes the term illumination fails to capture.

Third, McGowan argues that the term “perspicuity” should be replaced by the term “comprehension.” The problem with the concept of perspicuity, according to McGowan, is that “it can be understood to imply an access to the Scriptures that is entirely human and natural.”³³ Instead, he maintains “the same Holy Spirit who gives ‘recognition’ that the Scriptures are what they claim to be, also communicates the meaning of the Scriptures to us such that we have ‘comprehension.’” McGowan believes that the replacement of perspicuity with comprehension will emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation: “Certainly an unregenerate person can read the text, but a person cannot properly understand the Scriptures without the work of the Holy Spirit.”³⁴

McGowan’s fourth, and final, suggestion with respect to vocabulary is that we should opt for the word “infallibility” over and against the word “inerrancy.” He argues, “the term ‘infallibility’ maintains that the final authority for the Christian is the authority of God speaking in and through his word and that the Holy Spirit infallibly uses God’s

delusion when we recognize him in his image, that is, in his word” (ibid.). Donald McKim and Jack Rogers make the same mistake in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 182.

³¹McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 44.

³²Ibid., 46.

³³Ibid., 47. This is largely a misrepresentation of the Protestant understanding of perspicuity. See Gregg R. Allison, “The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Teaching” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995).

³⁴McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 48.

word to achieve all he intends to achieve.”³⁵ This is perhaps McGowan’s most radical vocabulary proposal, which he himself recognizes by devoting a significant portion of the book by discussing this topic. Therefore, according to McGowan infallibility becomes a function of what Scripture accomplishes, not what it is intrinsically. The Bible is infallible because the Spirit uses it to perfectly accomplish Gog’s intended purposes. Infallibility, therefore, is a better term, for McGowan, because it speaks of the Scripture’s functionality, not its nature.

McGowan believes that his restructuring of the *locus* of Scripture allows him to redefine the categories with which Scripture has been understood. The terms inspiration, illumination, perspicuity, and inerrancy are the products of a Western epistemology that understands Scripture to be a first principle, and in some cases a theological principle before God himself. Therefore, for McGowan, restructuring Scripture under the *locus* of the Holy Spirit allows him to think about Scripture in new categories as he redefines its terminology.

For McGowan, it is possible for God to act according to his will, and yet, not *necessarily* speak truthfully.³⁶ He argues this position based on the fact that God can act according to his will and should not be expected to act according to human expectations. However, a trinitarian model of biblical authority demonstrates that God the Father always speaks a perfect Word through God the Son, which is brought to its perfect effect by the work of the Holy Spirit. McGowan does not think his proposal is inconsistent with traditional views of authority and inerrancy, as he argues: “the Scriptures in their final canonical form are as he intended him to be and hence is able to use them to achieve its

³⁵Ibid., 48–49.

³⁶For an article-length review of McGowan’s proposal, see James W. Scott, “Reconsidering Inerrancy: A Response to A. T. B. McGowan’s *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (March 2009): 185–209.

purpose.”³⁷ A significant problem with McGowan’s alternative view of inspiration is that it is really, in some sense, a view of divine providence, not inspiration. McGowan argues for a case of inspiration that is merely concerned with the effect of God’s revelation, or what God intends to do with the Scripture. Biblical authority is not merely concerned with presenting a case for God’s intention, but for God’s speech itself. Our account for biblical authority must be characterized not only by the truthfulness that characterizes God’s nature, but also the truthfulness that characterizes trinitarian operations, including God’s speech. The Word that God the Father speaks is always authoritative and perfect.

There is much to consider with McGowan’s proposal. However, the main concern of this dissertation is to consider the implications of his pneumatological approach as it relates to the authority of Scripture. McGowan believes that his proposal of restructuring the *locus* of Scripture under the doctrine of the Holy Spirit will radically transform the way evangelicals understand the doctrine of Scripture. This restructuring will provide new categories for evangelicals to speak about and think about Scripture, according to McGowan. McGowan is correct to assert that the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture necessarily relate to one another in inextricable ways. These two doctrines mutually inform one another. However, he redefines the relationship between the doctrine of God and Scripture in order to redefine categories related to bibliology. However, does McGowan’s proposal faithfully consider the nature of trinitarian communicative activity? Does his pneumatological approach sufficiently connect the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of the Son and to the work of the Father? McGowan’s proposal is certainly a serious theological project. In subsequent sections I will consider how his approach could be enhanced in light of a trinitarian understanding of biblical revelation.

³⁷McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*, 162.

The Unbegotten Father

The entire system of Christian doctrine stands or falls on the confession of God's trinitarian nature.³⁸ Trinitarian theology is at the very core of the Christian faith. The trinitarian faith of the church arises out of the church's reflection on the biblical declaration that God is one and three. Scripture presents God as existing as one essence (οὐσία) and three distinct persons (ὑπόστασις): God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Accordingly, Christians believe in one God, in three persons. Along with the Shema, Christians declare that there is one God: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). God himself declares his self-sufficient existence by stating, "I am who I am" (Exod 2:14).

Equally important to the confession that there is one God, is the confession that God eternally exists as three persons. The persons of the godhead, "agree in essence, but are distinguished by relations. Since the essence is not divided, they are distinguished by distinguishing properties."⁴⁰ Augustine comments, "Let us believe that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is One God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, and that the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit either of the Father or the Son, but a Trinity of persons mutually interrelated and a unity of an equal essence."⁴¹ Trinitarian theology affirms that

³⁸For recent, but helpful, introductions on the doctrine of the Trinity, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007); Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History, and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Fred Sanders, "The Trinity," in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 21–46; idem, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

³⁹The οὐσία, or *essential dei*, refers to God as the only necessary, self-existent being, or in other words, the only being in whom existence and essence are inseparable. The ὑπόστασις or *modus subsistendi*, refers to the distinct modes of subsistence by which the persons of the Trinity are distinct. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 106, 195.

⁴⁰Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 234.

⁴¹Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 125.

each member of the Trinity is ὁμοούσιος or *consubstantial* because each shares equally in the one divine essence.⁴²

Each person, sharing equally in the one divine essence, is distinct. The Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Spirit is the Spirit. Relation distinguishes the divine persons and it is in this relation that each person subsists.⁴³ The immanent relations of the three persons in the divine being manifest themselves outwardly in the economy.⁴⁴ In the economy the eternal mystery of God is revealed.⁴⁵

In the economy all of God's outward works are common to the three persons and indivisible. Each person of the Trinity is active in every divine action, acting inseparably.⁴⁶ At the same time, specific divine actions can be more closely associated with one member of the Godhead than with others. Accordingly, all three persons of the

⁴²Consubstantiality indicates the numerical unity of essence in the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Nicene usage of the term ὁμοούσιος was probably limited to the refutation of Arianism and the affirmation of the substantial equality of the Father and Son. In the theological development of trinitarian theology, however, the Nicene language was rapidly interpreted as pointing to the concept of the oneness indivisibility of the Godhead. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 139.

⁴³Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 113.

⁴⁴Vanhoozer capably summarizes the difficulty of moving from narrative to ontological descriptions of God, from the way God appears in time, to the way God appears in eternity. He notes, "Those who begin with God's self-presentation in the history of Jesus Christ are trinitarian from the start. God's saving activity in history, centered on the work of the Son and Spirit (the economic Trinity), is the basis for knowing the way the eternal God is in himself (the immanent Trinity)." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72.

⁴⁵Augustine, *The Trinity*, 48. The eternal generation of the Son by the Father and the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son in the immanent Trinity constitute the ontological basis for the temporal sending (*mission*) of the Son and the Spirit. See, Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity & Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 77.

⁴⁶The term inseparable operations (*Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*) refers to the undivided external (*ad extra*) works of the Trinity. Specifically, because the Godhead is one in essence, one in knowledge, and one in will, it would be impossible in any work *ad extra* for one of the divine persons to will and to do one thing and another of the divine persons to will and to do another. This point is not to deny that personal works are not terminated on a single person. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 213.

Trinity are involved in every *ad extra* operation, but every act terminates on one person.⁴⁷

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, makes this point when he contends, “The Father plans everything well and gives his commands, the Son executes them and performs the work of creation, and the Spirit nourishes them and gives them increase.”⁴⁸ The Father works of himself, through the Son, in the Spirit and yet, all the works of God have one author. There is a natural order of persons in God, but without priority. Therefore, in the economy, all three persons of the Godhead work inseparably, while at the same time divine action terminates on a specific person of the Godhead.⁴⁹

The modes of subsistence of the Son and Spirit will be considered in later chapters, while this chapter will consider the Father, the first person of the Trinity. This section will briefly describe two characteristics that describe the first person of the Trinity: paternity and unbegottenness.

The Paternity of God the Father

The personal relation by which the Father is Father is his paternity.⁵⁰ The repetition of the name “Father” used to designate the first person of the Trinity in the New Testament signifies that paternity should be at the beginning of the study of the

⁴⁷*Ad Intra* refers to external and outward operations and *ad intra* refers to internal and inward relations.

⁴⁸Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1:521–22.

⁴⁹John Owen’s work is particularly helpful on this point. John Owen, *Communion with God*, ed. William Henry Goold, vol. 2, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965). For a helpful analysis on Owen’s understanding of trinitarian operations see Tyler R. Wittman, “The End of the Incarnation: John Owen, Trinitarian Agency and Christology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 3 (July, 2013): 284–300.

⁵⁰Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 219. “It is the personal relations in the doctrine of the Trinity, or modes of subsistence, that identifies the individual persons of the Trinity in relation to one another. There are, thus, three personal relations in the Trinity, the *paternitas* of the Father, the *filiatio* of the Son, and the *processio* of the Spirit. The *Relatio personalis* describes, then, the internal workings of the Trinity when indicated relationships of the persons one to the other.” Ibid.

person of the Father.⁵¹ Jesus is identified by, and identifies himself with, the God who is his Father. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16) who is one with the Father (John 10:30, 38; 14:10-11), who has an inner knowledge of the Father (Matt 11:27, John 5:20, 10:15, Luke 10:21-22), whom Jesus has seen (John 6:46), and who shares in the Father's glory (John 17:1ff.).⁵² The Father is most noticeably Father in relation to the Son. Scripture clearly points out that the name "Father" does not in the first place apply to God's relation to Israel and to believers; on the contrary, in its original sense it applies to the first person's relation to the Son.⁵³

Furthermore, the Father-Son relationship did not begin in space and time, but has existed from eternity (John 1:1, 14; 8:38; 17:5, 24). Therefore, paternity signifies the relation of source that the Father has with his Son.⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas notes, "The name Father signifies not only a property, but also the person itself. . . because this name Father signifies the relation which is distinctive and constitutive of the hypostasis."⁵⁵ Paternity is

⁵¹For a short and helpful essay on the theology of God the Father, see Emmanuel Durand, "A Theology of God the Father," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵²Emery notes, "The paternity of the Father designates the exclusive origin of Jesus, both in his action and in his being. His paternity is likewise manifested by the power and action common to the Father and Son, and reciprocal immanence. Thus it is in Jesus that we discover what the name "Father" means. The paternity of the Father is not illuminated first by studies in psychology or religious sociology. It is in hearing and contemplating Jesus that the church discovers who God the Father is. The whole person and action of Jesus are characterized by his relationship to his Father, a relationship available to human beings who welcome him." Emery, *The Trinity*, 30.

⁵³Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 272.

⁵⁴All that the Son and the Spirit have, they receive personally from the Father. The consubstantial deity of the Son and the Spirit with the Father is in no way diminished by the receptive status of the Son and the Spirit, for the Father shares with them all things (John 5:26; 16:13-15; 17:7), except the personal trait of being Father. See Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 184.

⁵⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1948) I.40.a.2.

most simply made known to us by the personal relationship between Jesus and his Father because, in a unique metaphysical sense, God the Father is the Father of the Son.⁵⁶

Herman Bavinck notes, “the name ‘God,’ ascribed to the Father in particular, means that in the divine economy he is first. It is an official title, as it were, a designation of his rank and position.”⁵⁷ By calling God “Father,” the language of faith indicates that he is the first origin of everything, even trinitarian relations.⁵⁸ To speak of the Father as divine origin does not indicate divine priority, but divine order.

Unbegotten

One of the clearest distinctions that the Bible makes about God the Father is that he is unbegotten, that is, he is without origin.⁵⁹ Scripture alludes to this principle as the Psalmist declares, “Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90). The Lord is the everlasting God (Isa 40:28). God declares, “Before me there was no god fashioned nor ever shall be after me. I am the Lord, I myself” (Isa 43:10). On the basis of such biblical affirmations the church has historically affirmed the unbegottenness of the Father.

Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* contends,

You must not imagine that the unbegotten God himself descended or ascended to or from anywhere. The ineffable Father and Lord of everything has not come up to any place, does not walk, does not sleep or get up, but rather stays where he is. He is not moved, nor is he confined to a particular location, for he existed before the world was made.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:272.

⁵⁷Ibid., 2:273.

⁵⁸John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 239.

⁵⁹To confess to the concept that the Father alone is unbegotten is not to indicate that the Spirit and Son are created. Rather, the Son is eternally begotten, not made, and the Spirit eternally proceeds.

⁶⁰Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ed. Michael Slusser, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 127.

Justin contends that unbegottenness is essential to defining the relation in which the person of the Father subsists. The only work essential to the Father is the active generation of the Son, which stated negatively, designates that Father as unbegotten.⁶¹

Christian theology, therefore, describes the Father as the *fons totius divinitatis*.⁶² That is to say, the Father is the source of all the Godhead.⁶³ In the immanent Trinity, the Father's mode of action is that of being, and that being is without principle.⁶⁴

Similarly, the Father is the *fons actionis*, the source of the activity of the persons of the Trinity in the economy.⁶⁵ Because God the Father is the first person of the Godhead he is the initiator and author of every *ad extra* trinitarian action. In the economic Trinity, the Father's mode of action is that of source.⁶⁶ He sends: the Father sends the Son and, together with the Son, sends the Spirit. Therefore, the Father is known as not coming forth from another person.⁶⁷

⁶¹Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 91. According to Berkhoff, "The personal property of the Father, is negatively speaking, that he is not begotten or unbegotten, and positively speaking, the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit. It is true that spiration is also a work of the Son, but in him it is not combined with generation. Strictly speaking, the only work the peculiar to the Father exclusively is that of active generation." Ibid.

⁶²This is a term applied solely to the Father, as he is the one person of the Trinity who is the ingenerate source of the filiation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 123.

⁶³Confessing the Father as the *fons divinitatis* does not mean that he generates the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, for the Son and the Spirit are themselves divine (*autotheos*). The assertion of *fons divinitatis* requires a firm grasp of the dogmatic distinction between essence and person. The Son and the Spirit, as divine persons, are from the Father. The Father, is then the 'font' of the persons who are divine. However, both the Son and the Spirit fully possess the identical, self-existent, underived divine essence. See Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit*, 184.

⁶⁴The immanent Trinity describes the "relationships among the three members of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in and with themselves." See Donald K. McKim, "Immanent Trinity," in *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 136.

⁶⁵Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 123.

⁶⁶The economic Trinity describes "the functions ('economies') or work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rather than their eternal being in relation to each other." McKim, "Immanent Trinity," 86.

⁶⁷Emery, *The Trinity*, 120. Emery further notes that the concept of innacibility retains a negative content that enables one to better glimpse the mystery of the Father. This innacibility also combats

It is for this reason that the Catholic tradition sometimes uses the word “author” (*Auctor*) to signify that the Father alone is the source, the principle of the Son and Holy Spirit, and that the Father himself comes forth from no principle.⁶⁸ For example, in distinguishing intratrinitarian relations, Thomas Aquinas reserved the word “author” solely for the person of the Father.⁶⁹ To confess that the Father is the “principle without principle” is to recognize that the Trinity derives its unity from the Father.⁷⁰ Therefore, in relation to the Son and to the Spirit, the Father is often called self-born, self-generated, uncreated, without beginning, self-originated, the ground of his own substance, self-caused, the beginning, cause, root, fount, origin, and head of the Son and of the Spirit.⁷¹ In summary, the Father is unbegotten.

Furthermore, in the economy of salvation the Father always acts through the Son and in the Spirit. Emery demonstrates the Father’s activity in the economy when he discusses the trinitarian act of creation:

The Father creates the world and fashion’s human beings through his Son and his Spirit, who were like his “two hands,” according to the beautiful expression of St. Irenaeus. But otherwise, it is through the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit that the Father exercises his paternal activity of creation in time. He is, in this sense, the Source of creation, because he is the Source of the Son and of the Spirit through whom he creates the world.

the temptation to think of the Father like a human parent. Human parents transmit what they have received, but God the Father alone gives to the Son and to the Holy Spirit what he has from no other person. Ibid.

⁶⁸Emery, *The Trinity*, 121.

⁶⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ed. Fabian R. Larcher (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), 7:29.

⁷⁰Emery, *The Trinity*, 122. This does not deny that the Son and Spirit are also *autotheos* (God of themselves). Each member of the Godhead is in himself God. The Son does not derive his essence from the Father, but in relation to the Father he is Son. Likewise, the Spirit does not derive his deity from the Father, and Son, but is himself God, and derives his personal subsistence as the one who proceeds from the Father and Son. Historically the Christian tradition has been pressed to express the essential unity and the relative distinction of the godhead. For an account, see Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷¹Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:308.

If in the external act of creation the Father is the source, might he also be the source of divine revelation? Before answering this question, it is necessary to discover how the Bible speaks about the authoritative speech of the Father.

The Authority of the Father

The preceding dogmatic account of the Father's paternity and unbegottenness provides a helpful framework for understanding the authority of the Father. However, a dogmatic account that does not take into consideration, and is not drawn from, biblical exegesis is insufficient. Therefore, it is important to ask how does the Bible itself speak about the Father's authority. In order to answer this question, three biblical passages will be examined that relate specifically to the authority of the Father: John 7:14-24, John 12:44-50, and Hebrews 1:1-2.

John 7:14-24

The first passage that will be examined is John 7:14-24. This episode represents a tumultuous time in the life and ministry of Jesus. Having spent significant time ministering in Galilee, Jesus refrained from entering Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Having entered Judea secretly to celebrate the Feast of Booths, Jesus began teaching. John records the account as follows:

About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it. ²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

One of the main questions that John is trying to answer for the reader is the

exact question that the Jews were asking in this passage: “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” How is it possible that a man without formal training and education could teach with such authority and precision? It was very common for Jewish males in Jesus’ day to be able to both read and write and to have a basic understanding of the Scriptures. Therefore, the Jewish leaders were not surprised by the fact that he was literate. They are surprised, however, with his authoritative and masterful teaching. The Jews were astonished that someone who had not studied in one of the great rabbinical centers of learning, or with a prominent rabbi could have such a mastery and command of Scripture.⁷² It was unusual that Jesus had the ability to carry on a sustained discourse in the manner of the rabbis, including frequent references to Scripture.⁷³

Carson points out that a traditional custom and consequence of having studied in a rabbinical school would be to substantiate every pronouncement by appealing to precedent, to earlier rabbinic judgments.⁷⁴ In other words, novelty was not prized. Rather, teachers were expected to appeal to a higher authority, an authority that the audience would recognize. Jesus follows this tradition by announcing that his teaching is, “not my own” (v. 16). Thomas Aquinas points out that this phrase offers a unique insight into the Father-Son relationship. He argues that the authoritative teaching cannot be from Christ alone, but, “it is from the Father: because the Son has even his knowledge from the Father.”⁷⁵ Aquinas’ conclusion echoes Christ’s contention that his authoritative teaching

⁷²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 311. Carson also points out that about a year later, Peter and John similarly confounded the religious authorities, who were compelled to observe that although they were “unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 4:13), they had been with Jesus and apparently drew their knowledge and authority from that exposure.

⁷³Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 232.

⁷⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 312.

⁷⁵Aquinas, Thomas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 70.

comes from his Father. Jesus contends that his Father subsists as one who speaks authoritatively.

Therefore, Jesus' teaching is not his own, but rather, Jesus' teaching comes from the one who sent him. The verb πέμψαντός means to dispatch someone, whether human or transcendent being, usually for purposes of communication.⁷⁶ Jesus, then, is the one whom the Father has sent for the purpose of self-revelation. As the one who is sent, Jesus quickly points out that his words, and all of God's self-revelation, originates with the Father. This is important to note, because at the exact time that a traditional rabbi would have appealed to the authority of his teacher, Jesus appeals to the authority of his Father. Jesus knows of no higher authority than the authority of his Father. While other rabbis were appealing to rabbinic tradition, Jesus appeals directly to the authority of his Father, making it clear that God the Father is the source and origin of his teaching authority.

Jesus also provides insight as to what constitutes a true messenger. According to Christ, a true messenger is one who does not seek their own glory, but the glory of the sender. The communicative activity of Christ is completely committed to the honor and glory of the one who sent him. Jesus' words are authoritative and true, not only because they are the words of his Father, but because in his self-revelation he seeks the glory of the Father, whose word is true. All of his words are meant to lead his audience to, and bring glory to, his Father, because he is the Father's true communicative agent.

This passage begins by pointing to the amazement of the Jewish people regarding the teaching of Jesus. They are amazed that Jesus could teach with such wisdom and authority without any formal training. Yet, the passage ironically demonstrates that their wonder should not be that Jesus is teaching with authority; rather,

⁷⁶ Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 793.

they should be amazed at the origin of his authoritative teaching: God the Father. Thus, this account is a demonstration of trinitarian communicative agency. The Father, in accordance to his relational subsistence, is the source of the authoritative and revelatory Word that is spoken through God the Son.

John 12:44-50

John 12:44-50 is preceded by several climactic events in Jesus' life. In John 12 alone Jesus is anointed by Mary at Bethany, a plot to kill Lazarus is unveiled, Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem sitting on a donkey, he foretells of his coming crucifixion, and he laments that, despite the many signs that have been performed for the people, they are still blind in their unbelief, and their hearts are hardened. In the midst of Jesus' anguish over unbelieving Israel, John records this episode:

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

In this passage the audience is struck by language that Jesus uses to identify himself with his Father. He presents himself and his Father as sharing an identity. Köstenberger argues that the section, "presupposes Jewish teaching on representation, according to which the emissary represents the one who sends him."⁷⁷ Jesus is demonstrating himself to be God's authoritative emissary because he shares in the identity of the Father. Jesus shares the divine identity to the point that to believe in him is to believe in the one who sent him.⁷⁸ Similarly, Beasley-Murray comments, "This principle of representation lies behind

⁷⁷Köstenberger, *John*, 393.

⁷⁸The same verb (πέμψαντά) is used here as was in John 7 to describe the work of Jesus as the one who is sent for the purpose of communication.

the reiterated statements of the gospel that Jesus is the sent One of God, commissioned to speak and act with authority in the Father's name."⁷⁹ Jesus is the ambassador who acts and speaks with the same authority as the Father. The Father-Son relationship guarantees that all that the Son reveals is from the Father. Commenting on this passage, Aquinas notes that Jesus' statement is pregnant with theological significance because it gives insight into the Father-Son relationship. According to Aquinas, Jesus is arguing, "I am not the source of myself, but I am from my Father."⁸⁰ Tertullian makes a similar point by saying, "It is through the Son that one believes in the Father, while the Father also is the authority from which springs belief in the Son."⁸¹

The theme of Jesus' submission to his Father in John's Gospel is prevalent throughout, and also has precedence in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 10:40, Mark 9:37, Luke 10:16). Jesus' entire ministry is submission to and performance of the will of the one who sent him because Jesus is the only one who can authoritatively reveal God. He alone is explicitly identified by the one he represents because the Father can be seen in the Son.⁸²

In this paragraph, a concept that runs throughout John's Gospel and the Synoptics is stated again: Jesus is God's agent, and those who believe in him actually believe in the one who sent him (John 13:20; Matt 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; 10:16). Due to the fact that Jesus is the representative of the Father – he is the one who makes

⁷⁹George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 217. Other instances of this kind of representation can be found in John 3:31-36; 6:36-40; 7:27-29, 33-34; 8:14-17, 28-29, 42-43; 10:34-36.

⁸⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 303.

⁸¹Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 23.8

⁸²See Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 217.

known the Father's revelation in words and action – rejection of his message is rejection of his Father and entails the judgment of God.

According to Jesus, rejection (ἄθετον) of his word entails judgment, and this judgment comes from the very word he has spoken.⁸³ The word of the Father is authoritative because it is worthy of being received and it is capable of judgment. This passage reflects Deuteronomy 18:18-19: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.”⁸⁴ One learns in this passage, according to Beasley-Murray, that “the word spoken by Jesus is the standard judgment of God, the giver of the word, and that such a judgment faces any who persist in rejection of the word, including its proclamation after the cross and offer of forgiveness.”⁸⁵ The words that Jesus speaks, since they are the authoritative words of the Father, will stand in judgment against those who do not listen. The authoritative word of the Father, according to Christ, is meant to be heard (ἀκούω), seen (θεωρέω), believed (πιστεύω), and received (λαμβάνω). Those who receive the Word of Christ are also receiving the Word of the Father, and in so doing, accepting the Father as an authoritative communicative agent.

The clearest theme of this passage is that Jesus rejects the idea that he is speaking on his own authority. Köstenberger notes, “The principal notion that Jesus rejects is that he came on his own initiative and authority for his own glory.”⁸⁶

⁸³Jesus' use of the word ἄθετον emphasizes the active rejection of an authority that is to be received. To reject Jesus' authority is to declare his word and message as invalid.

⁸⁴See Matthew J. O'Connell, “The Concept of Commandment in the Old Testament,” *Theological Studies* 21, no. 3 (1960): 352.

⁸⁵Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2008), 53.

⁸⁶Köstenberger, *John*, 393.

Furthermore, the revelation that comes through Jesus is inextricably tied to the self-revelation of the Father. Jesus is, once more, affirming that his being sent by the Father has implications for the origin of his message. Since his word is authoritative it is to be received and accepted. To reject the testimony of Jesus is to reject the testimony of the Father.⁸⁷

This episode in the life and ministry of Jesus demonstrates the need to consider trinitarian accounts of revelation and biblical authority. Even Jesus, when speaking about revelatory authority, appeals not to his authority and not to the authority of the Spirit, but to the speech and actions of his Father. Evangelical accounts of biblical authority should be informed by Christ's appeal to his Father's revelatory authority.

Hebrews 1:1-2

The opening line of the book of Hebrews begins with an exordium, which is an introduction designed to make the audience receptive to the rest of the author's message. The exordium is an introduction to the entire message of the book, which challenges the reader to respond appropriately to the voice of God in Scripture.⁸⁸ Hebrew 1:1-2 reads: "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 also he created the world." The function of this exordium is to establish rapport with the audience and to stir their emotions so they would be favorably disposed to receive what follows in the discourse.⁸⁹

The thrust of the exordium in the book of Hebrews is, "God spoke." Schreiner

⁸⁷Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit*, 53.

⁸⁸See, David Peterson, "God and Scripture in Hebrews," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Carl Trueman and Paul Helm (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 118–38.

⁸⁹Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Deerfield, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 97.

notes, “The final and definitive word has been proclaimed in the Son, so that the promises of the prophets are fulfilled in the Son.”⁹⁰ By presenting God as a speaker, the author of the book of Hebrews is using unconventional rhetoric, and making a noteworthy theological claim. At this point in salvation history Israel believed that God was silent. Josephus, in *Against Apion*, Book 1, notes, “It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.” First Maccabees 4:46 echoes this sentiment by stating, “And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.”⁹¹ The author of Hebrews contends that God the Father is now speaking and revealing through the Son.

Witherington contends that this theological claim stands in contrast to other theological claims at this point in salvation history. He points to another early Jewish writing. Second Baruch 85.1, written after the book of Hebrews, states, “In former times, even the generations of old, our fathers had helpers, righteous men and holy prophet. . . . But now the righteous have been gathered, and the prophets have fallen asleep. We also have gone forth from the land and Zion has been taken from us, and we have nothing now except the mighty one and his law.”⁹² The author of Hebrews is making the exact opposite theological assertion. The time of silence has ended. The Father is not silent; he speaks, and he has spoken (ἐλάλησεν) in his Son. It is fundamental to the author’s argument that the Father himself has not remained silent but has taken the

⁹⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 583.

⁹¹First Maccabees 9:27 continues this theme: “So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them.”

⁹²The author of Hebrews is not intentionally contradicting 2 Baruch; rather, Witherington is simply pointing out that the author of Hebrews is making that claim that God has once again spoken.

initiative to reveal himself.⁹³ Koester notes, “To reinvigorate the listeners, the author seeks to bring them into a renewed encounter with God’s word.”⁹⁴ The conviction that God cares for his people by and through his speech is developed as a major motif by the author of Hebrews, and the locus of God’s speech is Scripture.⁹⁵

Peter O’Brien notes, “Hebrews 1:1-2 begins by powerfully proclaiming the decisive nature of God’s saving action in and through Christ.”⁹⁶ The author begins to make his case for God’s speech by noting its temporal distinctions, first through the prophets, and second in his Son. O’Brien further notes, “This revelation is presented by means of four parallel contrasts, relating to the eras, the recipients, the agents, and the ways in which God has spoken. These contrasts however are not absolute. They draw attention to the two stages of divine revelation that correspond to the Old and New Testaments.”⁹⁷ Despite the temporal contrast that the author presents in the opening lines of Hebrews, it is worth noting what remains constant: the author. Koester comments, “The manifold revelation mentioned in 1:1 finds its unity in the One God.”⁹⁸ God’s authoritative Word was been progressively revealed, but the author remains consistent. Fanning notes, “The same God who spoke in former times through the prophets has now spoken ultimately in the good news about his Son Jesus Christ.”⁹⁹ Accordingly, the author of Hebrews is connecting God’s revelatory activity, and the Jewish distinctiveness

⁹³Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 47.

⁹⁴Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 183.

⁹⁵William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 11.

⁹⁶O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 47.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁸Koester, *Hebrews*, 183.

⁹⁹Buist Fanning, “Theological Analysis: Building Biblical Theology,” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*, ed. Darrell Bock and Buist Fanning (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 277.

of the one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), with God's self-revelation in Christ. The Father, through the incarnation of the only-begotten Son, speaks to his people. The Father subsists as an author.

Speaking of the former ways in which God made himself known, the author of Hebrews argues that the witness of the prophets came at "many times" (πολυμερῶς) and in "many ways" (πολυτρόπως).¹⁰⁰ O'Brien comments, "These two Greek adverbs have a powerful rhetorical effect in the original: they are emphatic by their position, length, and alliteration with the initial letter π 'p'."¹⁰¹ First, God has spoken at "many times." The author is not necessarily indicating the temporal nature of revelation, but rather its piecemeal or fragmentary nature.¹⁰² Second, God has spoken in "many ways."¹⁰³ The main point of the author in this sentence is to demonstrate to the reader a sense of progressive revelation.¹⁰⁴ The author is not suggesting that previous revelation was deficient, but that by comparison, what was good and partial, that came little by little, has now been brought to completion and fulfillment in the revelation of the Son. Wellum notes, "God's word-act revelation took place over a period of time, and as it was given it pointed beyond itself to something more to come."¹⁰⁵ Previous revelation is not insufficient because all self-revelation has God the Father as its authoritative author.

¹⁰⁰Koester, *Hebrews*, 177. These words are virtually synonymous and have to do with the various forms in which divine speech was given. In a positive sense, the author of Hebrews is emphasizing the scope and variety of the prophetic witness.

¹⁰¹O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 49.

¹⁰²Ibid. Some translators and interpreters understand the first adverb in a temporal sense, but (Πολυμερῶς), in fact, means "in many parts or pieces."

¹⁰³The verb πολυτρόπως indicates that the content of the message has not been altered, but rather the mode of communication. See, Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 850.

¹⁰⁴See Gene R. Smillie, "Contrast or Continuity in Hebrews 1.1–2?," *New Testament Studies* 51, no. 04 (2005): 543–60.

¹⁰⁵Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 89.

Despite the variety of forms in which God has spoken, in these last days, he has ultimately spoken in his Son. In 1:1 the author used the participial form of “speaking” (λαλήσας), but here the verb is indicative (ἐλάλησεν) to show that the Son is God’s definitive mode of communication. Accordingly, the author uses the preposition ἐν to indicate the intimate relationship between the communicative activity between the Father and the Son. The author elects not to use an article in this instance in order to communicate that Jesus is not one Son among many, but rather he is the One who exists as Son.¹⁰⁶ Wallace argues, “Although this probably should be translated ‘a son’ the force is clearly qualitative. The point is that God, in his final revelation, has spoken to us in one who has the characteristics of Son. His credentials are vastly different from the credentials of any prophet.”¹⁰⁷ The eternal, essential quality of Jesus’ Sonship qualified him to be the one through whom the Father utters his word.¹⁰⁸ Wellum argues that the author “places the Son in a qualitatively different category than the prophets who preceded him,” Therefore, “the Son is the one in whom all of God’s revelation and redemptive purposes culminate.”¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that the author is not suggesting that the eternal Son is not involved in revelation prior to the incarnation, but that in the incarnation of the Son is God’s definitive revelation. God the Father initiates self-revelation and the Son is the ultimate mediator of the Father’s communication.

The first two verses of Hebrews demonstrate an important point. God the Father is the source and authority of all revelation. God is known because the Father has spoken, and in the incarnation the Father speaks through the Son. Presenting God the Father as a speaker is persuasive rhetorically and significant theologically. The principal

¹⁰⁶See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 93.

¹⁰⁷Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 245.

¹⁰⁸See, Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 11.

¹⁰⁹Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 90.

cause of revelation is God, specifically God the Father. John Owen, commenting on Hebrews 1:1, says, “God, even the Father, by way of eminency was the peculiar author of both law and gospel.”¹¹⁰ The Word that he has spoken in the Son brings together the fulfillment of all of God’s self-revelation.

The three passages that have been examined are merely a small representation of the authority that is ascribed to God the Father throughout Scripture. Jesus continually claims that he is not speaking or acting on his own authority but as a representative of his Father. Both passages in John and the beginning of the book of Hebrews confirm that God the Father is the source, the *fons*, of communicative activity.

The Divine Origin of the Bible and the *Fons*

The goal of this dissertation is to make the case that an evangelical account of biblical authority would benefit from explicit trinitarian language. Specifically, this chapter has argued that Scripture is authoritative because of its divine origin, the unbegotten Father. This chapter has examined two evangelical accounts of the authority of Scripture, studied the nature of the paternity and unbegottenness of the Father, and considered three biblical passages (John 7:14-24; 12:44-50; and Heb 1:1-2) that demonstrate that God the Father is the source of divine speech and revelation. This chapter closes by drawing several conclusions related to the authorial agency of the Father and biblical authority. Furthermore, it considers how these findings might strengthen the two accounts for biblical authority that have already been considered, the CSBI and *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*.

First, the paternity and unbegottenness of God the Father underscores that divine utterances originate with the first person of the Trinity. As Father, his paternity means that he is first, the *fons* in the divine economy of revelation and salvation. As

¹¹⁰John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1973), 2.

unbegotten, he is the All Governing (παντοκράτορα) Creator (ποιέτην) of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.¹¹¹ The unbegotten Father is, therefore, in all external operations, even in the case of biblical revelation, the source. These two concepts, paternity and unbegottenness, signify that in the Godhead (eternal intratrinitarian relations), and in the economy of salvation, the Father is always first. Similarly, the biblical testimony reveals that God the Father has always been the source of God's revelation. Scripture, therefore, in its entirety is God the Father revealing God the Son.¹¹² Scripture is the almighty utterance of God the Father.

Second, as the origin who has no origin, and the author who has no author, God the Father is the supreme standard for Christian theology's account of biblical authority. Jesus himself points to God the Father as the author and authenticator of his words. Jesus rooted the authority of divine revelation in the speech and action of his Father. Jesus' doctrine of biblical authority appeals first and foremost to the speech of his Father. Evangelical treatments of biblical authority would do well to follow the example of Jesus by appealing to the authority of the Father in divine revelation.

Third, God the Father is seen as the primary source of revelation in the economy. As Hebrews 1:1-2 demonstrates, it is God the Father who initiates all revelatory speech. Trinitarian communicative activity always originates from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. Just as Jesus and the author of the book of Hebrews demonstrate, God the Father is the originating authority of triune discourse.

To this point, this chapter has considered how evangelicals can rely on God the Father in their appeals for biblical authority. Two evangelical theological formulations

¹¹¹All creeds of the church refer to God the Father as the creator of all things. See Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 104.

¹¹²See J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 91.

were considered, namely, the CSBI and McGowan's work *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*. The CSBI, most simply, makes the case that the Bible is God's Word because as the Bible speaks, so God speaks. While this is an accurate account, it is not as complete as possible. Particularly in an increasingly post-Christian and secular age, an evangelical account for biblical authority will benefit from using explicit trinitarian language. Instead of appealing generically to the Bible as being God's Word, the CSBI can provide a more robust account of biblical authority by arguing that it is the triune God's Word. More specifically, it is not a generic God who has spoken, but specifically the Christian God, who eternally exists as one divine essence in three distinct persons.

Furthermore, when the CSBI uses trinitarian language, it generally only refers to the work the Holy Spirit. Though, in some sense, this is accurate, by only giving an account for the Spirit's work the CSBI runs the risk separating the work of Spirit from the work of the Father and the Son. The CSBI would be able to rely on the entire witness and internal resources of the Christian faith with a retrieval of more robust trinitarian terminology.

The CSBI specifically locates God's act of creation in trinitarian activity; it should do the same with God's revelatory activity. God's creative utterances are set in the context of triune communicative activity, so his revelatory utterances should be set in the same context. It is God the Father who creates all things through God the Son, in the power of God's Holy Spirit. It is then also true that God the Father reveals himself through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. All of God's actions are consistent with trinitarian operations.

In McGowan's work one observes a stunted doctrine of trinitarian communicative activity and thus, a stunted doctrine of inspiration, authority, and inerrancy. In appealing solely to the work Spirit, McGowan fails to consider how God the Father is source, how God the Son is the content of his speech, and how God the Spirit is

the consummation of his speech. Unfortunately, in the confusion of trinitarian communicative activity, McGowan's work draws some tragic conclusions. McGowan does not do justice to the historic positions of inspiration, illumination, perspicuity, and inerrancy in order to further his case for the doctrinal relocation of Scripture.

Despite this unfortunate misstep, McGowan's attempt to relocate the doctrine of inspiration and authority to the doctrine of God can provide many benefits for evangelical theology. Any doctrine of Scripture must be informed, shaped, and molded by the doctrine of God. The work of the Spirit in the inspiration and composition of Scripture cannot be understated. McGowan aptly points out that the Holy Spirit has a unique role in the inspiration of the Bible. However, his work is not separated from the work of the Father and of the Son, something that McGowan fails to develop. Failure to weigh this matter sufficiently, results in an underdeveloped and insufficient doctrine of revelation. If McGowan had considered the implications of God the Father being the author of Scripture it would properly inform the work of the Spirit in authorship. By locating the doctrine of Scripture solely in the category of pneumatology, McGowan risks separating the work of the Spirit from the work of the Father and Son. He further implies that God's speech, his spiration, includes errors, a theological error that is avoided by properly considering trinitarian communicative agency. Consequently, McGowan's doctrine of Scripture suffers from a lack of depth and substance that trinitarian communicative activity provides.

Both of these contemporary evangelical accounts of biblical authority could be strengthened with an appeal to trinitarian authorship. Specifically, both of these accounts would do well to consider how God the Father is the ultimate author. It is God the Father who speaks and preaches the person and work of the Son, which is completed by the work of the Spirit. The Father is the origin who has no origin, the author who has no author, and the authority that establishes and gives all authority in heaven and on earth.

CHAPTER 3

THE BEGOTTENNESS AND INCARNATION OF THE SON AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

This dissertation gives an account for the authority of Scripture that is rooted in its divine authorship — more specifically, in its triune authorship. The thesis of this dissertation is that Scripture is authoritative because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all speak, with one voice, an authoritative Word. The previous chapter presented an argument for the authority of Scripture that is rooted in the divine authorship of the Father because he, being the unbegotten Father and source of all things, is the first speaker. The present chapter will seek to continue the argument of trinitarian authorship by exploring the relationship between the authorial agency of God the Son and biblical authority. How can the Son, the eternal Logos, be an authoritative speaker? How can the one who is eternally begotten by the Father speak authoritatively? Specifically, in what ways can evangelicals appeal to the Son in an account of biblical authority? This chapter will argue that the Bible is authoritative because the Son is both the authoritative mediatorial *agent* through whom the Father speaks and at the same time the authoritative *content* of the Father's speech.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the Son's authorship for biblical authority, this chapter first explores two representative accounts from the evangelical tradition that appeal to Christology and incarnational categories of condescension and accommodation in their respective accounts of biblical authority. Second, this chapter examines two dogmatic categories related to Christology, namely, sonship and incarnation, each of which impacts an evangelical doctrine of biblical authority. Third, this chapter investigates various biblical texts that appropriate authoritative speech to

God the Son. The specific texts that are explored are John 5:19-26; 8:25-29; 14:8-11; and Revelation 1:1-3. Fourth, this chapter seeks to draw several theological conclusions by presenting a theological account of biblical authority that takes into consideration the divine authorship of the Son.

The Authority of Scripture and the Son: Soundings from Evangelicalism

Drawing the connection between God's revelatory accommodation in the incarnation and his revelatory condescension in inscripturation is not uncommon in evangelical theology.¹ "Christian theology is accustomed to using the phrase 'word of God' in two distinct and important senses, to refer to the Son of God and to the Bible," argues Cameron.² Many have argued that, at minimum, an analogical relationship exists between the Word of God incarnate and the Word of God inscriptured. Scott Swain notes,

The humble form of Scripture is closely related to the humble form that God assumed in the incarnation, for prophets and apostles are swept up in the mission of God the incarnate Word. The second person of the Trinity assumed the form of a servant in order to accomplish our redemption, so God's speech has assumed a servant form in holy Scripture in order to communicate redemptive revelation.³

In both the incarnation and inscripturation, God condescends in order to make himself known.

Recently, several evangelical theologians have appropriated Christological and incarnational categories into their understanding of the ontology of Scripture. In this

¹For a helpful discussion of the incarnational analogy as it relates to the doctrine of inscripturation, see Nigel Cameron, "Incarnation and Inscripturation: The Christological Analogy in Light of Recent Discussion," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 35–46; Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 58–61.

²Cameron, "Incarnation and Inscripturation: The Christological Analogy in Light of Recent Discussion," 35.

³Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 70.

chapter, two specific evangelical sources are described, focusing specifically on how each account of bibliology appeals to Christological categories. The two sources that are considered in this chapter are Peter Enns's *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* and Kenton Sparks's *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship*.⁴ Both of these accounts appeal to Christological categories in their attempts to define what the Bible is and how it ought to function in the life of the church. The following section briefly describes both accounts, and at the end of the chapter each proposal will be examined in light of Christological and trinitarian communicative activity.

Peter Enns

Peter Enns is a biblical scholar and theologian who formerly served as Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary. In 2005 Enns sparked controversy with the publication of his book *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*.⁵ His primary purpose in this work is “to bring an evangelical doctrine of Scripture into conversation with the implications generated by some important themes in modern biblical scholarship—particularly the Old Testament—over the past 150 years.”⁶ Enns believes that the standard evangelical account of bibliology is largely stunted because of its failure

⁴Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); and Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵For a representative account of the evangelical response to Enns's work see: Gregory K. Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration: A Review Article of Inspiration and Incarnation by Peter Enns,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 287–312; James W. Scott, “The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns. Part I, Inspiration and Its Implications,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (March, 2009): 129–83; James W. Scott, “The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns. Part II, The Interpretation of Representative Passages,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 2 (September, 2009): 247–79; Adam P. Groza, “Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (September, 2005): 86–87.

⁶Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 13.

to consider evidence that has been unearthed by biblical criticism. Evangelicals have largely failed to engage doctrinal issues in light of archaeological, historical, and textual discoveries.⁷ Enns hopes to “provide a theological paradigm for people who know instinctively that the Bible is God’s word, but for whom reading the Bible has already become a serious theological problem – perhaps even a crisis.”⁸ Therefore, one of Enns’s central themes in his book is that “The problems many of us feel regarding the Bible may have less to do with the Bible itself and more to do with our own preconceptions.”⁹

Enns lays out his project by addressing three points: the Old Testament and other literature from the ancient world, theological diversity in the Old Testament, and the way in which the New Testament authors handle the Old Testament. He concludes his work, after addressing these three issues, by putting forth a theological proposal that addresses what the Bible is and what we are supposed to do with it. Each of these important topics will be addressed in turn.¹⁰

Before addressing Enns’s proposal, it is important to consider the framework that he is proposing, which he believes will provide a solution to the apparent problems in the Bible. He proposes that the way forward is to understand that the Bible is analogous to the incarnation. He labels this concept the “incarnational analogy,” which, as already noted, is not a new category in evangelical theology. The starting point for a discussion of the incarnational analogy is simple: as Christ is both divine and human, so is the Bible.¹¹ Christian confession about the person of Christ according to Enns is, “Jesus is both God

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 15.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰This chapter does not address the detailed issues that Enns discusses related to biblical criticism, but how his theological presupposition of the incarnational analogy functions in his understanding of the ontology of the Bible. For a detailed critique of Enns’s proposals related to biblical criticism, see Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration.”

¹¹Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 17.

and human at the same time. He is not half-God and half-human. He is not sometimes one and sometimes the other. He is not essentially one and only apparently the other.”¹² He further points out that Chalcedonian Christology, clarified in AD 451, confesses that Jesus is one person with two natures, one divine and one human. Therefore, according to Enns, since Chalcedon maintains that Christ is fully divine and fully human, bibliology should maintain the confession that the Bible is both a human and divine. In the same way that Jesus is both God and human, so the Bible too is a divine and human book.¹³ Therefore, according to Enns, Christ’s incarnation is analogous to Scripture’s inspiration.¹⁴

Enns further remarks that many modern Christians maintain a view of the Bible that is analogous to the Christological heresy of Docetism.¹⁵ The concept of Docetism stems from the Greek word *δοκεῖν*, “to seem,” or, “to appear to be.” Related to Christology, this was the view that Jesus Christ was not a real man, but simply appeared to be so. Chalcedonian Christology rightly concluded that if Christ only appeared to be human then salvation was not accomplished, because that which is not assumed is not saved. Therefore, Enns maintains, “What some ancient Christians were saying about Christ, the Docetic heresy, is similar to the mistake that other Christians have made about Scripture: it comes from God, and the marks of its humanity are only apparent, to be explained away.”¹⁶ In contrast to scriptural Docetism, Enns believes that the human dimension of Scripture is a necessary component of what makes Scripture, Scripture. Therefore, Enns believes, “What is so helpful about the incarnational analogy is that it

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁵Ibid. See also G. W. Grogan, “Docetism,” ed. J. D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 305.

¹⁶Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 18.

really orients one to see that the Bible's 'situatedness' is not a lamentable or embarrassing situation, but a positive one."¹⁷ He continues his argument by stating, "That the Bible, at every turn, shows how 'connected' it is to its own world is a necessary consequence of God incarnate himself." Therefore, the human element of the Bible is essential to Scripture being Scripture.

However, according to Enns, although the Bible "bears an unmistakable human stamp this does not lead to the necessary conclusion that it is merely the words of humans rather than the word of God."¹⁸ Enns believes that if one considers that when God speaks, he speaks in ways we would understand, then evangelicals can finally engage in the scholarly conversation that has been happening for generations, not in order to determine if the Bible is God's word, but to see more clearly how it is God's word.

First, Enns explores the relationship between the Old Testament and other literature from ancient world. His purpose is to demonstrate the historical situatedness of the Bible, that is to say, how "human" the Bible is. Enns considers the impact of recent discoveries of Akkadian and other Ancient Near Eastern literature have on biblical interpretation. For example, he suggests that the purpose of the creation account of Genesis was to provide a contrast to other Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts such as the Babylonian myth, *Enuma Elish*.¹⁹

Enns also considers the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh flood accounts. He examines these accounts, not to argue that the Genesis account is dependent on other flood stories, but merely to recognize that there are obvious similarities between the stories that indicate some kind of connection.²⁰ Enns's desire is for evangelicals to acknowledge that

¹⁷Ibid., 20.

¹⁸Ibid., 21. To those who hold such a position, Enns would ask, "How else would you have expected God to speak? In ways wholly disconnected to the ancient world? Who would've understood him?"

¹⁹Ibid., 27.

²⁰Ibid., 29. Other examples of Ancient Near Eastern literature that Enns considers are the law

the Old Testament is firmly rooted in the worldview of its time. As a result of his study, Enns argues that biblical stories such as the creation and flood accounts must be understood first and foremost in their ancient contexts. He also affirms that this is not a concession that should embarrass evangelicals. Rather, such rootedness in the culture of the time is precisely what it means for God to speak to his people, and this realization should help evangelicals produce a more sound doctrine of Scripture.²¹ Specifically, Enns argues,

For God to speak at a certain time and place — he enters their world. He speaks and acts in ways that make sense to them. This is surely what it means for God to reveal himself to people — he accommodates, condescends, meets them where they are. The phrase ‘word of God’ does not imply disconnectedness to its environment. In fact, if we can learn a lesson from the incarnation of God in Christ, it demands the exact opposite.²²

God’s revelation must always be read in light of its ancient context. By grounding the Bible in its ancient history one recognizes that the Bible is a deeply and fully human book.

Enns concludes by making three focused points. First, “a contemporary evangelical doctrine of Scripture must account for the Old Testament as an Ancient Near Eastern phenomenon by going beyond mere observation of the fact to allowing that fact to affect how we think about Scripture.”²³ Any doctrine of Scripture that does not sufficiently account for the incarnational dimension of Scripture is inadequate. One cannot merely confess the human element of the Bible, but the human element of the Bible must inform one’s ontology of the Bible. Second, a doctrine of Scripture that takes

code of Hammurabi, Hittite and Suzerainty treaties, David and the Tel Dan inscription, the Siloam Tunnel inscription, and the Mesha inscription. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is not necessary to consider the details of all of these examples. For a thorough review of this material, see Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration.”

²¹Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 56.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 67.

into account its incarnational dimension should have implications for how Christians use Scripture.²⁴ Understanding the Old Testament in its original context has implications for how contemporary readers apply the text of the Old Testament to their contemporary situations. According to Enns, this understanding of the Bible has implications for how one can conceive of the normativity and the authority of the Old Testament. Third, the incarnational dimension of Scripture continues today.²⁵ Enns is not making the case that the canon is not closed, but rather, “every generation of Christians in every cultural context must seek to see how God is speaking to them in and through the Scripture.” Furthermore, “it is not that the Bible is a timeless, contextless, how-to book that we are meant to apply to today’s world. Rather, the Bible itself demonstrates the inevitable cultural dimension of any expression of the gospel.”

The second major theme that Enns investigates is the theological diversity of the Old Testament. He attempts to answer the question, “Why do different parts of the Old Testament say different things about the same thing?” In this section, Enns employs an approach to biblical interpretation that devotes a great amount of energy to engaging what he calls, “the tensions and ambiguities in the Old Testament.”²⁶ He comments that the contrast between Jewish and Christian interpretation is how each handles the diversity of Scripture, by which he is referring to the Old Testament’s different perspectives or points of view on the same topic.²⁷

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 72.

²⁷Enns comments, “[T]he Christian task has been more defined by relegating such tensions and ambiguities to the background in favor of proclaiming a more unified message. After all, the Old Testament is not there to set us on an interpretive adventure, but to tell us what God is like, what he has done, who we are as his people, and what we are to do in response. What is needed is unity, a message. If the Bible is written ultimately by one author, God, there is little room for tensions.” Ibid., 73.

Enns's aim is to encourage evangelical interpretation to consider the theological diversity of the Old Testament and to consider what this diversity tells us about what the Bible is and who God is — a God who has given us a thoroughly human document.²⁸ Enns explores several areas where he perceives diversity within the biblical text. He considers diversity in the Wisdom Literature, such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. He also considers the apparent contradictions and alternate histories between Chronicles and similar account founds in Samuel – Kings.

After exploring the diversity and apparent contradictions in Scripture, Enns concludes by reflecting on what this tells us about what Scripture is. He believes that the fact of theological diversity in the Old Testament is not contrary to the Bible being the word of God.²⁹ The theological diversity of Scripture tells us that there is no superficial unity to the Bible; portions of the Bible are simply in tension with one another, which is merely a matter of observation.³⁰ It is here where he returns to the fundamental principle of his argument, namely, the incarnational analogy. He argues that to brush aside the theological diversity of Scripture is to neglect that God reveals himself through accommodation. He reasons, “to be understood, God condescends to the conventions and conditions of those to whom he is revealing himself. The word of God cannot be kept safe from the rough and tumble drama of human history. For the Bible to be the Word of God implies the exact opposite.”³¹

Enns argues that the unity of the Bible should not be sought at a superficial level that is based on passages taken in isolation, but rather, “the unity of the Bible is more subtle but at the same time deeper. Enns continues,

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 108.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 109.

Christ is supreme, and it is in him, the embodied in word, that the written Word ultimately finds its unity. Christ is the final destiny of Israel's story, and it is to him that the Bible as a whole bears witness. As Christians, this is our theological starting point. This does not make all the tensions evaporate before our eyes. Rather, because we know that in Christ Scripture coheres, he is the proper starting point from which to view and respect these tensions... To put it another way, if, as Christians say, Christ is the focus of Scripture, we should allow that focus to come into play in how we understand Scripture.³²

Therefore, Enns applies his incarnational principle of Scripture to the issue of theological diversity. He concludes, "the diversity of Scripture — and the tension that this diversity introduces — bears witness to God's revelation rather than detracts from it," which in essence is what God does in Christ in the incarnation.³³ In the same way that we see tensions and ambiguities in Christ's incarnation, so too, Scripture has tensions and ambiguities due to its thoroughly human nature.

The third major theme of Enns's work is how the New Testament authors use the Old Testament. By exploring issues such as context and authorial intent, Enns argues that what is modeled for us in the New Testament's use of the Old Testament is that Christ is the goal of the Old Testament story, which means that he should be the ultimate focus of all Christian interpretation. He argues, "the New Testament authors were not engaging the Old Testament in an effort to remain consistent with the original context and intention of the Old Testament authors."³⁴ Enns argues, in light of the interpretive method of the New Testament writers, for Christotelic interpretation.

By exploring the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, biblical interpretation in Second Temple literature, and apostolic hermeneutics as a Second Temple phenomenon, Enns makes the case for Christotelic interpretation: "To read the Old Testament 'christotelically' is to read it already knowing that Christ is somehow the end to which the Old Testament story is heading."³⁵ He then makes the case that in light

³²Ibid., 110.

³³Ibid., 111.

³⁴Ibid., 115.

³⁵Ibid., 154.

of diverse interpretive traditions, we should understand the contextual nature of interpretation by recognizing that, “God gave us the gospel not as an abstract doctrinal formulation... When God speaks and acts, he does so within the human drama as it is expressed at a certain time and place and with all the cultural trappings that go along with it.”³⁶ God’s revelatory action takes place in time and history.

Finally, “It is in the person and work of Christ that Christians seek to read the Old Testament, to search out how it is in Christ that the Old Testament has integrity, how it is worthy of trust, how the parts cohere.”³⁷ Drawing once again on the concept of the incarnational analogy, Enns declares, “Coherence is not found by superficially putting isolated pieces of the Old Testament together to make it fit somehow, but by allowing the tensions to remain in asking how powerful the knowledge of God’s incarnational pattern can add to our reading of Scripture.”³⁸ Thus, Enns is encouraging biblical interpreters to consider what the ‘humanness’ of the Bible suggests about what the Bible is.

For Enns, in Scripture one sees God willingly and enthusiastically participating in our humanity.³⁹ He further elaborates by saying, “We trust the Bible, not because we can show that there is no diversity, but because we believe, by the gift of faith, in the one who gave Scripture to us. We are to place our trust in God who gave us Scripture, not in our own conceptions of how Scripture ought to be.”⁴⁰ Theologians, through an inductive reading of the Bible should draw conclusions about the Bible without constricting the nature and function of the Bible to philosophical and logical categories.

³⁶Ibid., 160–61.

³⁷Ibid., 170.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 168.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 128.

Enns's proposal presents many points of consideration for evangelical theologians. His emphasis on the humanness of Scripture and the incarnation analogy of the Bible are elements of bibliology that evangelical theologians must properly give an account. For the purpose of this dissertation, the most important concept that must be addressed is his understanding of the incarnational analogy. However, from a theological perspective, does the incarnational analogy provide evangelical theology with the theological latitude that he asserts? Is there any theological precedent for Enns's proposal? In a subsequent section, his proposal will be considered and critiqued on the basis of trinitarian communicative activity, specifically in light of the Son's communicative and mediatorial activity.

Kenton Sparks

Another recent project that considers the relationship between the ontology of the Bible and biblical criticism is *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* by Kenton Sparks. This book is an attempt to engage evangelicals on the topic of biblical criticism.⁴¹ Throughout the book, Sparks argues that historical criticism — in spite of its potential faults — offers a relatively accurate portrait of Scripture that will be of theological value once the church correctly understands its insights.⁴²

⁴¹For recent reviews of Sparks's work, see Kenneth Keathley, "God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March, 2010): 198–201; Jason Sexton, "God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship," *Master's Seminary Journal* 20, no. 1 (March, 2009): 121–24; Peter J. Williams, "God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 30, no. 1 (March, 2012): 113–19. Sparks also addresses the topic of biblical authority in Kenton Sparks, *Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). In this book, Sparks argues that the Bible itself is a part of our fallen creation and is, therefore, just like humanity, in need of redemption.

⁴²Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 23. Sparks argues that the church's response to historical criticism is analogous to the church's response to Galileo: "All of us believe that the Earth orbits the sun, and in this idea we find nothing deceptive, theologically dangerous, or heretical. Yet it is instructive to recall that this was not always so. When Galileo first joined Copernicus in intimating that the earth was not at the center of the universe, he was soundly rebuked by church authorities—Catholic and Protestant alike—who averred that Scripture, church tradition, and common sense clearly taught that the

Informed by his assumptions about God and humanity, Sparks comments on the nature and ontology of Scripture. He asserts that evangelicals have appropriated theological categories onto the Bible that the Bible does not claim for itself. For example, Sparks contends that the argument that God's perfection should necessitate a perfect text is inherently flawed. Sparks contends,

Is it therefore possible that God has selected to speak to human beings through adequate language rather than inerrant words, and is it further possible that he did so because human beings are adequate rather than inerrant readers? Might it be the very height of divine wisdom, of inerrant wisdom, for God to speak to us from an adequate human horizon rather than from his divine, inerrant viewpoint? Before we presuppose what kind of discourse God must offer us, perhaps we should carefully consider the discourse itself to see what he has done in Scripture.⁴³

Therefore, for Sparks, what is mediated to humanity in God's revelation is adequate communication for adequate interpreters. Christian theologians should not expect God to communicate himself any other way than through fallible accommodation because we are fallible interpreters.

Biblical interpreters, according to Sparks, can uniformly apply, and benefit from, the principles of historical criticism in their study of the Bible. Sparks believes that biblical criticism, when carefully considered, will imply something about the Bible and its nature of verbal discourse. According to Sparks, a consideration of biblical criticism will demonstrate that, "Scripture presents itself both as the words of God and, often, as the words of human authors."⁴⁴ Therefore, any theological understanding of biblical authorship must give appropriate consideration to the book's divine and human origin.

astronomer was wrong. Some of Galileo's detractors even refused to consider the evidence by looking through his telescope. The astronomer was eventually put on trial in the church proceeding, during which church authorities insisted that he recant his views. Galileo eventually yielded to their demands and we can surmise that his words of repentance did not convince the gray matter in his head. . . . However, the church eventually realized that his astronomy was correct and integrated his new insights into its worldview. This had the positive effect of rendering Galileo's ideas theologically safe." Sparks asserts that evangelicalism's rejection of biblical criticism would be analogous to the church's rejection of Galileo's observations.

⁴³Ibid., 55.

⁴⁴Ibid., 76.

Therefore, “to the extent that the Bible is truly a product of human authorship, this seems to imply that the Bible’s viewpoints will reflect the limited historical contingencies of its human authors and audience.”⁴⁵ For Sparks, then, readers of the Bible, since it is a human document, should not be surprised when they encounter errors, diversity, limited perspective. These characteristics demonstrate that God’s word is an inherently human text—and therefore fallible, diverse, limited, and prone to error.⁴⁶

Sparks believes that one of the results of historical criticism is that many traditional beliefs about the Bible and its interpretation have been rejected for new and fresh perspectives on the biblical texts. Sparks maintains,

Critical readings of the Bible produce a portrait of the text that is often at odds with traditional readings of the sacred page. These readings challenge traditional views of the authorship and dating of the texts, raise serious questions about the historicity of key biblical events, aver that Scripture provides diverse and sometimes contradictory theological opinions, and in some cases even impugn the motives and insights of the Bible’s human authors, who on occasion become the ostensible purveyors of failed prophecies, political ideology, and social propaganda.⁴⁷

He further argues, “If the practitioners of biblical criticism are right on even a modest portion of their claims, then God’s written Word certainly reflects far more humanity than traditional evangelicals might expect.”⁴⁸ Theologians must be willing to accept the biblical text for what it is, in all of its humanity.

Sparks realizes that there is a great deal of tension between the traditional understanding of the Bible and higher criticism. Further, evangelical scholars, according to Sparks, have a largely rejected biblical criticism for more traditional readings of the text because of their understanding of the ontology of Scripture. He thinks that the

⁴⁵Ibid., 76–77.

⁴⁶Again, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to address every point of biblical scholarship that Sparks raises, among which are chronological and theological diversity within the Pentateuch, Israelite historiography, the authorship of Isaiah, issues related to the Gospels, and several others.

⁴⁷Sparks, *God’s Word in Human Words*, 132.

⁴⁸Ibid.

evangelical tradition should embrace the adjustment that biblical criticism offers to Christian theology, which is exactly what he believes his project does.

Sparks puts forth his understanding of the Bible when he begins to explore the nature of the Bible. He argues, “the Bible is profoundly unique among books because it is, in its essence, both divine and human discourse. It is the voice of God, but also the voice of Paul, of the evangelists, and of the Israelite prophets and sages, and the countless others through whom God has given us Scripture.”⁴⁹ His notion of the nature of Scripture is that it is both a divine and human book.

Sparks first considers the relationship between the Bible’s divine and human elements by considering the humanity of the Bible. Sparks maintains that the Bible is a thoroughly human document, a document that portrays characteristics that are essential to fallen humanity such as error, mistakes, and diversity. The Bible must be received for what it is, the words of humans to other humans.

However, Sparks also wants to receive the Bible, not only as human discourse, but as divine discourse — as God’s authoritative words inscribed through human writers to human readers. In order to confess the Bible as divine discourse, Sparks appeals to divine accommodation. For Sparks, accommodation is God’s adoption of Scripture to speak to the human audience in a finite and limited perspective.⁵⁰ Sparks appeals to divine accommodation because he believes it allows for a robust historical-critical approach to Scripture while maintaining the ability of Scripture to function authoritatively as God’s Word. Divine accommodation is, “a necessary feature of

⁴⁹Ibid., 205.

⁵⁰Ibid., 243. Addressing the issue of accommodation, Sparks believes that “The modern description of accommodation comports nicely with the common evangelical notion that Scripture has been communicated to us through the vocabulary, style, and personality of its authors.” He appeals to article 8 of the CSBI, which reads as follows: “We affirm that God in his work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom he had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that he chose, overrode their personalities.”

revelation when this is mediated to us through the finitude and fallenness of a human author,” according to Sparks.⁵¹

Sparks claims, much like Enns, that evangelicalism’s failure to properly incorporate accommodation into its doctrine of Scripture results in a Docetic understanding of the Bible — a Bible that is certainly divine but only appears to be human. In a revealing statement, Sparks alleges, “Scripture’s humanity is perhaps better illustrated through an adoptionistic metaphor (God has adopted the human author’s words as his own) than through a Christological metaphor (where the human word is God).”⁵² Rather than fully appropriating an incarnational analogy, Sparks prefers adoptionistic language, which allows him to affirm the Bible as a human document that God adopts as his own.⁵³ Therefore, Spark’s proposal is slightly different from Enns’ in that he claims that God had adopted human words and sanctified them as his own in order to accomplish his purposes. The adoptionistic language that Sparks’ uses is essential for understanding Sparks’ proposal. According to Sparks, this is how God works. He adopts the work of humanity, though it is imperfect, adopts and sanctifies it as his own and uses it to reveal himself. For Sparks, this is much more beautiful than the so-called Docetic proposal that only gives lip-service to the humanity of Christ and Scripture.

Sparks is ultimately suggesting a specific relationship between the Bible and historical criticism. He suggests that Christians should trust the Bible as their authority while at the same time appreciating and appropriating the insights of biblical criticism. Evangelical theologians, according to Sparks must allow the insights and discoveries of historical criticism to inform their understanding of the nature of the biblical text.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 253.

⁵³ Adoptionism is the heresy that that viewed Jesus as merely a virtuous human being chosen by God to be elevated to divine Sonship, through being anointed with his Spirit and resurrected as Lord of the church.

The accounts of Scripture that are given by Enns and Sparks both make use of the language of divine accommodation. Enns sees Christ's incarnation as a helpful parallel to God's revelatory purposes in inscripturation. It is clear that the language of divine accommodation when speaking of Scripture is a part of the Christian tradition. John Calvin notes, "For because our weakness does not attain to His exalted state, the description of Him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it."⁵⁴ Elaborating on divine accommodation, Calvin says, "For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this He must descend far beneath His loftiness."⁵⁵ For Calvin, God stooped through accommodated language in order to communicate to his creation.⁵⁶ However, divine accommodation for Calvin did not include God condescending to error-prone communication, but rather, to a way of communicating that is intelligible to creatures, a distinction that both Enns and Sparks would likely deny.

The language of accommodation and adoptionism, as seen in the theologies of Enns and Sparks, has often been applied to Scripture. Are the categories that Enns and Sparks use to describe the nature and authority of the Bible accurate? Do they accurately appropriate language concerning the doctrine of God into their understanding of communicative activity? Before answering these questions, it is essential to explore the dogmatic categories relating to the doctrine of Christ that have implications for triune

⁵⁴John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1:13.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶For further reading on Calvin and accommodation, see Paul Helm, "Divine Accommodation," in *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184–208.

communication, specifically divine accommodation, as well as several passages in Scripture that give insight into the nature of the Son's authoritative speech.

Sonship, Incarnation, and Communicative Activity

The whole of human history revolves around God's actions in the person and work of Christ. At the heart of the gospel lies the confession that there is one mediator between Creator and creation, Jesus Christ, sent by the Father who loved the world (John 3:16). The sending of the Son has its presupposition and foundation in the trinitarian being of God, and specifically in the Son's relation to the Father.⁵⁷

Following trinitarian communicative logic, in what way is the person of the Son active in an account of biblical authority? If the Father is the source and initiator of all triune speech, in what way is the Son involved in trinitarian revelation? In what way is the Son a communicative agent? This chapter argues that the Bible is authoritative because the Son is the authoritative *content* of the Father's speech and at the same time the authoritative mediatorial *agent* through whom the Father speaks. In order to demonstrate how the Son is the authoritative content of the Father's speech and as the mediatorial agent for the Father's speech, it is essential to explore two dogmatic categories, namely, sonship and incarnation. Both of these Christological categories indicate that the Son is both the one whom the Father has spoken and through whom he speaks.

Sonship and Triune Communicative Activity

The category of sonship pertains to the relationship of the divine second person of the Trinity to the Father. The following section will provide a theological account of

⁵⁷Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 274.

sonship that comments on the specific relational characteristics that mark the relationship between the Son and the Father.

The specific relation in which the second person of the Trinity subsists is filiation, that is, by nature Jesus is the eternally-begotten Son.⁵⁸ The relative property of the Son is to be eternally begotten, that is, to proceed from the Father timelessly and to be a participant in the same essence (John 10:30) and perfectly express the Father's nature (Heb 1:3).⁵⁹ The Son is eternally God in himself.

However, the Son is not the Father, as he is the Son. Speaking of the person of the Son the Nicene Creed states, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father."⁶⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus contends, "He is called Son because he is identical with the Father in essence, and because he is from the Father."⁶¹ The Son, therefore subsists and acts in accordance with

⁵⁸Richard A Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 118. The second person of the Trinity is known by his *filiation*. Again, this relates to the *relation personalis* of the Son, which indicates how the divine person of the Son relates to the Father and Spirit. The divine Son is begotten, not made, according to the Christian tradition. Therefore, to speak of eternal generation is to specify the Son's self-differentiation within the life of God in eternity. For a helpful article on how the doctrine of eternal generation, a doctrine sometimes overlooked by evangelicals, impacts evangelical theology see, Keith E. Johnson, "What Would Augustine Say to Evangelicals Who Reject the Eternal Generation of the Son?" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16, no. 2 (2012): 26–43.

⁵⁹For recent work on the doctrine of eternal generation, see Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012). Scripture teaches that the Son is both one with the Father and yet distinct from the Father. The doctrine of the eternal generation (John 1:18) rightly emphasizes both truths. Eternal generation maintains that the Father eternally and timelessly communicates the divine essence to the Son without division or change so that the Son shares an equality of nature with the Father, therefore the Son is God in himself, yet is also eternally distinct from the Father. *Autotheos*, then, affirms that the Son is God in himself, but not from himself. See, Scott Swain and Michael Allen, "The Obedience of the Eternal Son," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 2 (April 2013): 114–34.

⁶⁰John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine From the Bible to the Present* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 30.

⁶¹Edward Rochie Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 3:190–91.

his mode of being, and his mode of being is to be eternally begotten from the Father. Therefore, the Father and the Son are ontologically related to one another in that the Father is only Father in relation to the Son, and the Son is only the Son in relation to the Father.⁶² The eternal begottenness of the Son implies that the Father begets the Son out of his very being.⁶³ Turretin notes,

This generation was made without time (*achronos*); not in time, but from eternity. Therefore not priority or posteriority of duration can be observed here, although there may be priority of order according to which the Son is from the Father, although not after the Father. Without place (*achoristos*) because the Father did not beget out of himself, but in the same essence. Hence the Word (*Logos*) is said to have been with God, and the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father. [3] Without any passion (*apathos*) or change, either in the Father or in the Son, since that he begat denotes no imperfection, but is rather the reception of all perfection.⁶⁴

The Son, therefore, being himself truly God, is perfectly equal with the Father and all subordinationism is banished.⁶⁵

The relationship that exists between the Father and the Son indicates several important relational characteristics that deserve explanation. First, the Father and the Son share reciprocal knowledge and love (John 17:11, 25).⁶⁶ Jesus makes this clear as he contends, “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27). The Son therefore has the unique knowledge and ability to know, and to reveal, the Father. Jesus, therefore, is the authoritative revealer of the Father because he is the Son, the one who

⁶²For a helpful essay on the subsistent relations that characterize the divine persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit, see Thomas G. Weinandy, “Trinitarian Christology: The Eternal Son,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Matthew Levering and Gilles Emery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 387–99.

⁶³Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 309.

⁶⁴Francis Turretin, *Volume 1: First Through 10 Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, Institutes of Elenctic Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 293.

⁶⁵Bavinck, *God and Creation*., 2:287.

⁶⁶Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 27.

knows the Father truly and fully.

Second, the Father and Son are unified in their identity (John 10:30; 14:8-9; Col 1:15; Heb. 10:30).⁶⁷ This is evidenced by the fact that the New Testament church included Jesus in the divine identity of the God of Israel. According to Bauckham, “High Christology was possible within a Jewish monotheistic context, not by applying to Jesus a Jewish category of semi-divine intermediary status, but by identifying Jesus directly with the one God of Israel, including Jesus in the unique identity of this one God.”⁶⁸ Since it is the Son who, in unity with the Father, accomplishes the work of the Father, he is also identified with the Father. The Son does what God alone can do because he is God. The Bible teaches that the Son possesses all the divine attributes, and that the Son is worshiped in a way that is reserved only for the one true God of Israel.⁶⁹ This is evidenced in the fact that the early church included Jesus in the divine identity in a way that is fully continuous with Jewish monotheism.⁷⁰

Third, the relationship of the Father and the Son is characterized by the unity of their action, power, and authority. Augustine comments that the Father and Son, “have but one will and are indivisible in their working.”⁷¹ Jesus accomplishes the work of his Father (John 5:19-23). The unity of action, power, and authority that is shared by the

⁶⁷Ibid., 29.

⁶⁸Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 3. One can see that the New Testament writers are already, in a deliberate and sophisticated way, expressing a fully divine Christology by including Jesus in the unique identity of God as defined by second Temple Judaism. Once we recognize the theological categories with which they are working, it is clear that there is nothing embryonic or tentative about this. In its own terms, it is an adequate expression of a fully divine Christology. It is a Christology of divine identity.

⁶⁹Stephen J. Wellum, “The Deity of Christ in the Apostolic Witness,” in *The Deity of Christ, Theology in Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 115–50.

⁷⁰See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*; idem, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

⁷¹Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 103.

Father and the Son reveals the mutual relationship that exists. Gregory of Nazianzus comments,

The Father is the principle of unity, for from him the other two [speaking of the Son and the Spirit] derive their being, and in him they are drawn together: not so as to be fused together but so as to cohere. There is no separation in the Trinity, in terms of time or will or power. These factors make human beings a plurality, each individual at odds with one another, even with themselves. The unity properly belongs to those who had a single nature and whose essential being is the same.⁷²

Because of the oneness of their nature, the Father and the Son are always characterized by their integrated, united, and inseparable operations. The Father and Son, therefore, share in the same life because the Father has eternally begotten the Son (John 5:26).

The theological category of sonship indicates that Christian theology affirms that the Son is the eternal Word of the Father. The Son is the Son because he has been begotten by the Father, and as the begotten Son he shares the Father's knowledge, action, power, authority, and identity. For God the Father to beget is for him to speak, his speech is his Logos, and his Logos is eternal (John 1).⁷³ Vanhoozer notes, "The Father's begetting the Son is a communicative act whereby the Father shares being/existence/life with the Son."⁷⁴ The communicative relationship between the Father and Son indicates

⁷²Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 42," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 7:119-20. This is Gregory's classic account of why Christians, who confess the threefold divine persons of Father, Son, and Spirit, are nevertheless confessing only one God. He continues, "[T]hat which is without beginning, and the beginning, and that which is with the beginning, these are one God. Neither lack of beginning or lack of generation constitutes the nature of that which has no beginning: for an entity's nature is never constituted by what it is not but what it is; it is defined by positing what it is, not by removing what it is not. The Beginning is not separated, by virtue of its being a beginning, from that which has no beginning, for beginning is not the nature of the former, nor his lack of beginning the nature of the latter. These are attributes of nature, not the nature itself. And that which is with the Unoriginate and with the Originate is not something other than what they are. But the Unoriginate has the name of Father; the Originate as the name of Son; that which is 'with the Originate' is called the Holy Spirit. But these three have the same nature, namely, Godhead."

⁷³Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.1, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 205.

⁷⁴Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 255. Vanhoozer further notes, "To say that the Son is eternally begotten is to speak of a movement that is both successive (i.e., ordered) and simultaneous (i.e., there was never a time when the Son was not begotten)." *Ibid.*, 244-45.

that the Son is eternally and timelessly the content of the Father's communication and the mediatorial agent of the Father's revelation. The Son is the eternal content of the Father's speech because it is in the Son, and in the Son alone, that the Father makes himself known. Therefore, the unbegotten Father eternally speaks the eternally begotten Son.

The Incarnation as Accommodated Revelation

In the incarnation the Son continues to act in accordance with his mode of subsistence. The incarnation demonstrates that in the economy the Son is the content and mediator of the Father's communicative activity (Hebrews 1:2). The Son has been sent by the Father, as the Word of the Father, to speak the Word of the Father. As Vanhoozer notes, "Sending, then lies at the very heart of Christian thinking about the triune God."⁷⁵ The economic mission of the Son, and his incarnation, reflects his eternal relation to the Father. The theological category of the incarnation provides an example for how the Son acts as the authoritative mediator and authoritative content of revelation.

The incarnation of the Son demonstrates how the Son acts as authoritative mediator and content in the economy, which has important implications for an account of Biblical authority that professes to have the Son as the Bible's mediator and content. This section will comment on various aspects of the incarnation, focusing specifically on the concept of the incarnation being accommodated revelation.

In the incarnation the divine Son, who is eternally begotten by the Father, was sent by the Father, "for us and for our salvation." The sending of the Son involved the Son's assumption of a human nature.⁷⁶ John states, "And the Word became flesh and

⁷⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Westminster John Knox, 2005), 69.

⁷⁶The Chalcedonian Creed aptly confesses the hypostatic union as it maintains, "We apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten in two natures; and we do this without confusion the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union." Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 36.

dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).⁷⁷ It is out of God’s great love for his creation that he sent his Son, as John demonstrates: “For God so loved the world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Commenting on the intent and effects of the incarnation, Athanasius states, “For he alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.”⁷⁸ Accordingly, in his state of humiliation and condescension, the Son is God’s authoritative ambassador as he alone is the content and mediator of the Father’s self-revelation. In the doctrine of the incarnation, Christians declare that God has definitively and clearly revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is only in a trinitarian faith that God can remain in his essence who he is and yet still communicate himself to others, which is exactly what happens in the incarnation.

The incarnation discloses the unique communion of Jesus with his Father in a unity of existence.⁷⁹ In the same way that the Son is sent by the Father, he has his existence from the Father. In other words, when trinitarian doctrine speaks of the divine person in terms of “relation of origin,” it is not a speculation detached from the economy of salvation, but rather it proposes a doctrine grounded in the teaching of the Gospels about Jesus, whose existence is always relative to his Father. The mystery of the Father and Son is present and revealed in the economy. Therefore, the incarnation has its presupposition and foundation in the trinitarian communicative activity of God. It is in the incarnation, the Father’s sending of the Son, that we recognize that our knowledge of

⁷⁷For a helpful work on the incarnation from the perspective of biblical theology, see Graham A. Cole, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

⁷⁸Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 33.

⁷⁹Emery, *The Trinity*, 27.

God does not begin with the ascent of the mind, but with God's descent to human beings in Christ.⁸⁰ This sending involves accommodation and condescension, as Christ assumes a human nature. In the incarnation God makes himself known to us in a way that creatures can comprehend, through his sent Son who takes on full human nature.

The concept of divine accommodation in the incarnation is essential to a Christian understanding of the incarnation. Church history is scarred by misunderstandings of Christ's state of humiliation in the incarnation by struggling to maintain the confession of Christ's two natures (divine and human) in one person. The theological heresies of Arianism, Docetism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, and Kenoticism demonstrate that theologians have struggled to give adequate emphasis to the divine and human natures of Christ's person.⁸¹

Does the concept of accommodation necessitate that Christ divested himself of his divinity? Is Christ's incarnation merely the appearance of condescension? A central question in triune communicative activity is, "What does the incarnation teach about accommodated divine revelation?"

The church has maintained that Christ is of the same essence as God (*homoousion to patri*).⁸² Speaking of the incarnation, Paul comments, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19). Athanasius, in his theological treatise *On the Incarnation*, which was written to dispel the false teaching of Arianism, notes, "His body was for Him not a limitation, but an instrument, so that He was both in it and in all things, and outside all things, resting in the Father alone. At one and the same time

⁸⁰Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 12.

⁸¹For a helpful work on the Christological formulation of the early church, see Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Stephen Bowden, vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975).

⁸²John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine From the Bible to the Present* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 36.

– this is the wonder – as Man He was living a human life, and as Word He was sustaining the life of the universe, and as Son He was in constant union with the Father.”⁸³

Therefore, in the incarnation, the divine Logos is both revealed in the humanity of Jesus Christ and in his divine activity of upholding the world. Even in an accommodated state the Son is one with the Father.

Origen comments on God’s condescension in the incarnation by pointing out that the Word remains unchanged. He argues, “For this divine descent he had no need of change . . . for he remains unchanged in his essential being while he descends to take part in human affairs by the providence and dispensation of God.”⁸⁴ The incarnation, then, as an example of divine accommodation demonstrates that condescension does not necessitate change. In relation to the incarnation, the Christian tradition is unwilling to attribute mutability to the divine Logos while at the same time refusing to attribute anything less than full humanity. In the incarnation the Son is still the Son, and as Son he is the Father’s accommodated revelation. Athanasius describes incarnational accommodation by stating, “now he entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in his love and self-revealing to us,” because in the incarnation God deals with his creation as “a good teacher with pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means.”⁸⁵ He continues, “The Savior of all, the Word of God, in his great love took to himself a body and moved as man among men, meeting their senses. . . . He became himself object for these senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things

⁸³Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 17. He further comments, “The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere as well. When he moved His body He did not cease also to direct the universe by His mind and might. No. The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things Himself. In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it; ordering, directing, giving life to all, containing all, yet is He Himself the Uncontained, existing solely in His Father” (ibid.).

⁸⁴Origen, “Against Celsus,” in *Tertullian (IV), Minucius Felix, Commodian, Origen*, ed. Alexander Roberts et al., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 4:294.

⁸⁵Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 43.

might apprehend the Father through the works which he, the Word of God, did in the body.”⁸⁶ The incarnation is the perfect example of God’s revelatory accommodation because the incarnate Son is the authoritative content and authoritative mediator of the Father’s revelation.

While maintaining the confession of the full divinity of Christ, the church also affirmed that Christ is also fully human. The Chalcedonian Creed maintains that, “This selfsame one [Christ] is perfect both in deity and also in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul and a body.”⁸⁷ This confession is the result of Scripture’s teaching that ascribes to Jesus all the constituent elements of human nature (John 1:14).⁸⁸ In the incarnation God comes to humanity not merely in appearance, but in reality. There is one mediator between God and humans, Christ Jesus, himself a human.⁸⁹

Sonship and the incarnation are two important Christological categories for understanding trinitarian communicative activity. The Son, the logos, subsists as the one who is eternally begotten by the Father, and is thus, the content and mediator of the Father’s communication. Further, the Son, in the economy, is sent as the Father’s self-revelation and to be the communicative mediator of the Father. The Son’s mode of being is informative for a trinitarian account of biblical authority because it is in and through his mode of being that the Son participates as an authoritative author of Scripture, a claim that Scripture itself makes. The Son, dogmatically speaking, is the content and mediator of the Father’s communicative activity.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 35–36.

⁸⁸Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*, 3:297. Not only is a body ascribed to Christ (Matt 26:26, John 20:12, Phil 3:21; 1 Pet 2:24), but also flesh and blood (Heb 2:14), bones (John 19:33–34), head, hands, and feet (Matt 8:20; Luke 24:39), a soul (Matt 26:38), spirit (Matt 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 13:21), consciousness, (Mark 13:32), and a will (Matt 26:39; John 5:30; 6:38).

⁸⁹Ibid., 3:298.

The Authority of the Son

The preceding dogmatic account of the Son's filiation and incarnation paternity provides a helpful framework for understanding the authority of the Son. However, a dogmatic account that does not take into consideration, and is not drawn from, biblical exegesis is unsatisfactory. Therefore, it is important to ask how the Bible itself refers to the Son's authoritative speech. The testimony of Scripture establishes that there is a unique relationship between the Father's authoritative speech and the Son's authoritative speech. Jesus, throughout his ministry, is accused of speaking and working with power and authority that can only be ascribed to the God of Israel. He "teaches with authority and not as the scribes," his adversaries protest (Mark 1:22). He continually claims to have the authority to forgive sins and pronounce judgment (Matt 11:20–24).⁹⁰ The Bible consistently ascribes a unique authority to the words and ministry of Jesus which, as will be demonstrated later, has implications for an evangelical account of biblical authority. Thomas Oden notes,

What is the fulcrum of his weighty authority? It appears to be greater than the prophets, whose authority was derived from God, for Jesus' authority was derived from his own person. He often said, 'Truly I say to you,' noticeably different from the prophetic formula of speech, 'Thus says the Lord.' The 'I' is either an extremely egocentric 'I' or one that directly illumines his identity.⁹¹

The authority with which Jesus spoke and acted, and the content of his message testify that the Son serves as the content and the mediatorial agent of the Father's revelation. It is essential, then, in any account of biblical authority, to consider how the Bible describes the authoritative speech of the Son.

All that God the Father speaks is through the Word. The Christian canon begins by describing God as a speaker. Genesis 1 portrays God's creative activity as

⁹⁰For a brief overview of the concept of authority in the Gospels, see Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), s.v., "Authority and Power," by G. S. Shogren.

⁹¹Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 2:40.

being mediated through his speech. A phrase that appears ten times is, “And God said...” Thus, the communicative activity of God, specifically the mediatorial and creative power of the *logos*, must be a central theme of Christian theology. Similarly, the Gospel of John introduces God’s salvific activity in redemptive history by stating, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-3). The Apostle Paul continues the biblical theme of the mediatorial activity of the *logos* in Colossians 1:16, which portrays Christ as the one through whom “all things were created, in heaven, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” The previous chapter argued that God the Father is the origin of divine revelation. This chapter maintains that the Son is the content and mediator of the Father’s revelation. Therefore, God the Father authors Scripture through the Son. Therefore, it is worth considering exactly how the Bible itself witnesses to the speech and communicative activity of Jesus.

While many texts could be examined, John 5:19-26; 8:25-29; 14:8-11; and Revelation 1:1-3 provide insight into the Son’s authoritative communicative activity.⁹² The following passages will establish biblical categories and language for grasping the nature and content of the Son’s authorial agency.

John 5:19-26

In the beginning of John 5, Jesus is found to be breaking the Sabbath as he heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Initially, the Jews question the man who was healed, and Jesus himself, regarding why such things were being

⁹²The purpose of examining the following biblical texts is not to provide complete exegesis of each text, but rather to examine the nature of Jesus’ authoritative speech in the context of Trinitarian communicative activity.

performed on the Sabbath. The Sabbath offense is soon seen by the Jews as minuscule in comparison to Jesus calling God his own Father, “making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Köstenberger notes, “The controversy surrounding the characterization of God as Jesus’ Father erupts in full force,” in this episode.⁹³ Jesus claiming God as his Father, making himself equal with God, and sharing in divine prerogative and authority, becomes a major theme in the Gospel of John as the Jewish leaders take strong exception to Jesus’ claims. The following passage in particular becomes one of the most historically and theologically significant for understanding the communicative relationship between the Father and Son. In the following several paragraphs Jesus describes his relationship with his Father by saying,

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

The major theme of this passage, expressed in the opening verse, is the unity of essence and action between the Father and the Son. This passage demonstrates a “communion of action,” notes Vanhoozer.⁹⁴ Jesus, as the unique Son of God, does nothing on his own initiative, but always act in harmony with his Father.

Verse 20 describes the Father-Son relationship by applying an apprentice-like relationship to the Son. J. Ramsey Michaels argues, “The terminology comes from the parable-like character of Jesus’s words. That is, a son, like any son learning his father’s

⁹³Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 364.

⁹⁴ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 258.

trade, does what he sees his father doing.”⁹⁵ Jesus’ actions are always prompted by his Father, and he always does just what he sees (βλέπει) the Father doing.⁹⁶ The verb ποιεῖ (to do) is a third person, present, active indicative, which indicates that the Father is presently doing that which the Son sees. The Son, sharing in constant reciprocal knowledge and action of the Father, always has the Father in his sight.

However, this parable-like language provides a deeper look into the relationship that is enjoyed between the Father and Son. The Son, in accordance with his mode of subsistence, and in agreement with his participation in the divine nature, had present access and knowledge of the action of the Father. Augustine comments, “the Son does the very same things that the Father does when the Father does them through the Son.”⁹⁷ In the economy the Son acts in accordance with his mode of being, as the Son of the Father. “The Son sees by awareness of the nature that is by his generation,” according to Ayres.⁹⁸ The Son intrinsically sees the works of the Father because of his unique mode of subsistence. The Son is from the Father, yet he possesses all that the Father is, but he possesses it as a gift from the Father.

For any son to act in a way contrary to the ways of his father would be a denial of his sonship. Carson notes, “The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions, and grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs his Father’s will, and receives authority.”⁹⁹ Therefore, Carson continues, “It is impossible for the Son to take independent, self-

⁹⁵J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 308.

⁹⁶For a helpful chapter on the ‘showing’ and ‘seeing’ relationship between the Father and the Son, see Lewis Ayres, “Showing and Seeing,” in *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 230–50.

⁹⁷Augustine, “Gospel of John,” in *Gospel of John, First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 7:171.

⁹⁸Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 237.

⁹⁹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 251.

determined action that would set him over against the Father as another God, for all the Son does is both coincident and coextensive with all the Father does.”¹⁰⁰ For the Son to act in a way that is not in unison with the Father would be a denial of his mode of being because for the Son to see the Father, and for the Father to show the Son all he is doing, is a way of expressing the eternal generation of the Son.

Furthermore, the Son, in his obedient action, reveals the Father by doing the deeds of the Father, such as executing judgment and raising the dead, and by performing the Father’s will (John 5:27-29). He is able to perform the Father’s will because the Father, in his love for the Son, shows (δείκνυσιν) the Son all that he is doing. Again, the verb is a third person, present, active indicative, which indicates the continual, unbroken, communion between the Son and the Father. The Father has perfectly disclosed himself to the Son in eternity, and continues to do so in the present, as they share in the divine essence and have eternally existed in the joyful and loving Father-Son relationship. Consequently, the Son, in the economy is able to authoritatively exegete, narrate, and reveal that Father.¹⁰¹

The unity of action between the Father and the Son is demonstrated in verse 21, which discusses the power and authority to raise the dead. The Son does whatever the Father does because of the Father’s perfect self-disclosure to the Son. The prerogative of raising the dead belongs to God alone, and here it is seen that Jesus shares in this authoritative action with the Father.

Furthermore, not only does the Son have authority to give life to the dead, but he also has authority to judge on the last day. The Father gives this authority to judge to the Son, which further demonstrates the unity of action between the Father and Son and the order of trinitarian operations. The unity of action between the Father and Son is for

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 252.

the purpose that all might honor the Son as they honor the Father.¹⁰² Michaels comments that since an agent acts on behalf of the sender, “whatever is done to, or for, the agent is done to, or for, the sender.”¹⁰³ Therefore, whoever honors the Son honors the Father.

The harmony of the Father and the Son is evidenced by the fact that by not honoring Jesus as the Son, his hearers are dishonoring the Father. It is not possible to believe the word of the Father and to turn away from the Son.¹⁰⁴ That both the Son and the Father are to be rightly honored and trusted continues to display their unity of identity and action. Thus, whoever fails to acknowledge the authority of the Son also fails to acknowledge the authority of the Father; in order to acknowledge the authority of the Father, one must rightly recognize the authority of the Son.

Jesus claims that the way he gives life is through his Word. The passage explains that the authority and power to escape judgment, for which the Son is responsible, and to raise the dead, is connected to the Son’s authoritative speech. Jesus maintains that those who hear his word possess eternal life. Jesus’ use of the word ἔχει indicates that believers presently possess eternal life, which runs counter to contemporary Judaism. Jewish thought maintained that eternal life was attained in a future event.¹⁰⁵ The Son, the spoken Word and the speaking Word of the Father, grants life to those who hear and believe. By the power and authority of his word he is able to presently grant eternal life to those who hear. The appropriate response for anyone who hears the words of the Son is to believe in the Father, because the Son is the content and mediator of the Father’s Word. Accordingly, to believe in the Word of the Father is to believe in the Son.

¹⁰²The subordinating conjunctive ἵνα is used in order to indicate purpose. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 669.

¹⁰³Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 313.

¹⁰⁴Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 280.

¹⁰⁵Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 188.

Bultmann rightly notes that Jesus' words are not didactic propositions, "but an invitation and a call to a decision."¹⁰⁶ Augustine remarks, "Christ has enlightened you, and now you believe, passing immediately from death to life. Abide in that to which you have passed, and you shall not come into judgment."¹⁰⁷ The words of the Son are powerful, authoritative, and efficacious. His words bring life and animate because he is the Word of the Father. Calvin notes, "but though life be only begun in us, Christ declares that believers are so certain of obtaining it, that they ought not fear death; and we need not wonder at this, then they are united with him who is inexhaustible fountain of life."¹⁰⁸ The one who hears the words of Christ and believes in the Father is certain to have obtained everlasting life. The Son's speech is authoritative and powerful. The certainty of Christian salvation, therefore, rests on the authoritative Word of the Son that is spoken through him by the Father.

In verse 26, trinitarian communicative action comes into focus as the Father and Son demonstrate the order of operations. Augustine comments that the Father "begot [the Son] timelessly in such a way that the life which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave it."¹⁰⁹ The Son speaks the efficacious Word of life of the Father because it has been timelessly granted to him (John 1:3). However, this granting of life from the Father to the Son is something that the Son possesses in himself (ἐαυτῷ), as the eternally begotten Son, who is himself God. The Word of Christ is efficacious to grant life because the Word that he speaks is from the Father, who has life in himself.¹¹⁰ Life is derived from the Father, who breathes life into

¹⁰⁶Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 21.

¹⁰⁷Augustine, "Gospel of John," 303–4.

¹⁰⁸John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 204.

¹⁰⁹Augustine, *The Trinity*, 432.

¹¹⁰The pronoun ἐαυτῷ is used to describe both the Father and the Son as having life in themselves, indicating that there is nothing different in the way that the Father and Son possess life.

people and who is the fountain of life (Gen 2:7; Ps 36:9). Yet, the eternally begotten Son who has life in himself is able to grant life through the power of his Word because he is the content and mediator of the Father's Word. The eternal generation of the Son indicates that, like light flowing from light, the Son's speech flows from the Father's speech.¹¹¹

John 8:25-29

This passage is preceded by an episode where Jesus continues to refer to himself as Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) (John 8:12-24).¹¹² This declaration refers directly to Exodus 3:13-14, where Moses asks God to identify himself with a name that can be used to tell the leaders of the Israelites that this God is the God of their fathers. God replies to Moses' inquiry, "I am who I am. This is what you say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" The LXX text uses Ἐγώ εἰμι as the referent of God's name.¹¹³ It is directly after Jesus' continual use of that phrase that the following episode takes place.

So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

The initial inquiry, "Who are you?" prompts Jesus to reveal the nature of his relationship with the Father. His use of Ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) leads his audience to question his identity. Jesus maintains that his revelatory witness has been consistent from the start of his ministry. Jesus is claiming that, "he is altogether what his words show him to be,"

¹¹¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 172.

¹¹²For a study on the "I Am" statements in John's Gospel, see David Ball, *I Am in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background and Theological Implications*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).

¹¹³For a fuller description of Jesus' use of Ἐγώ εἰμι, see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 333–34.

according to Morris.¹¹⁴ Jesus argues that a major function of his ministry is to declare to the world the words of his Father. Jesus hears the words of the Father because as the divine Son, he subsists as the one who fully knows and reveals the Father. He is, according to Morris, “altogether what his words show him to be.”¹¹⁵ His revelation has been consistent from the beginning. The audiences lack of understanding is not the result of unclear communication from Jesus, but from their hardness of heart. He is exactly who he says he is.

Verse 26 indicates that his being sent in the economy is central to Jesus’ understanding of his identity. A fundamental component to his distinctiveness, according to Jesus, is his sending (πέμψας) from the Father.¹¹⁶ The sending language invoked in this instance is meant to indicate that the purpose of the Father sending the Son is communicative. He is sent as the content and mediator of the Father’s speech. Jesus thinks in terms of his mission, and in accordance with his relational subsistence, as the eternally begotten Son who has been sent by the Father. Regarding verse 26, Carson remarks, “The contrast between the revelation he mediates from the Father and the stance of his hearers is so great that what he is saying is *about* them, but inevitably *in judgment of them*.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Jesus declares that his statements are authoritative because of their source, his Father.¹¹⁸ The consistency of the revelation from the Father through the Son is rooted in the filial relationship between the Father and the Son. All that Jesus does

¹¹⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 399.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Again, the verb is used with the purpose of communicating that the purpose of Father sending the Son is in order to reveal. See Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 793.

¹¹⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 344.

¹¹⁸ *καὶ γὰρ* is an emphatic aligning of Jesus with the Father’s message. The aorist ἤκουσα accords with the custom of John’s Gospel when reference is made to Christ’s hearing from the Father (3:32, 8:26, 40; 15:15). See Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 401.

and says is thoroughly reliable and authoritative because it rests on the one who sent him.

In verse 27 Jesus continues to maintain that he has been sent by his Father, something that his audience has still failed to grasp. The audience does not recognize his heavenly origin, and it means nothing to them that he can trace his message back to his Father. The Father, for the purpose of revelation, sent his Son to make himself known. The Son, in obedience and love, condescended to assume a human nature for the purpose of accommodating the revelation of the Father to creatures.

In light of their inability to understand, Jesus continues to explain who he is and the source of his authority. Jesus points to the revelatory aspect of the cross: his humiliation by crucifixion reveals his identity. Once Jesus is crucified his hearers will know that he spoke words of truth and life. Here again, Jesus continues to emphasize that he does not act as an isolated individual on his own initiative. He repeats from verse 26 that everything he says is “just as the Father taught him.” His message is not of human origin, but divine.¹¹⁹

A comment concerning the intimate communion that the Father and Son enjoy follows Jesus’ claims of authoritative communication. Again, the primary characteristics of Jesus’ identity are his unity with the Father and his sending from the Father. Even in the incarnation the Son shares in the divine essence and the joy of trinitarian fellowship. The Father is with the Son in the sense that the Father and Son continually share in eternal divine communion because in the incarnation the Son, though completely united to the human nature, exists outside of the human nature in the eternal divine communion.¹²⁰ The Son’s continual enjoyment of unity with the divine essence, even in

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 111. The so-called *extra calvinisticum* maintains, “The Word is fully united to but never totally contained within the human nature and, therefore, even in the incarnation is to be conceived of as beyond or outside of (*extra*) the human nature.” Ibid.

the incarnation, allows him to hear, see, and do, all that the Father does, which makes him the quintessential self-revelation and mediator of the Father.

The communion between the Father and Son is evidenced by the fact that Jesus is always active in doing what pleases the Father. Jesus' use of the term "always" (πάντοτε) signals that his relationship with the Father is perpetually unbroken. The Son is eternally obedient as he is eternally the Son. Therefore, the main thrust of this passage is that Jesus, the Father's authoritative mediatorial agent, speaks in a way that is pleasing to his Father. Further, his message is authoritative because he is the one who is revealed by the Father. He is the content and purpose of all of the Father's revelatory actions. Jesus, in the incarnation, is the sent Son who continues to affirm the intimacy and unity that characterize the relationship between the Father and Son. In this sense, Jesus' speech is authoritative because its origin is always in his Father. Furthermore, his speech is authoritative because as the authoritative mediator his identity and action are in unison with the Father.

John 14:8-11

Chapters 13 through 17 in the Gospel of John form what theologians have designated Jesus' farewell discourse.¹²¹ In this discourse, Jesus explains that his followers cannot immediately follow him (John 13:31-38), he asserts that he is the only way to the Father (John 14:1-14), and announces the imminent arrival of the Spirit (John 14:15-31). Jesus goes on to explain that his relationship with his followers is similar to that of branches to a vine (John 15), that the world's hatred will fall upon his disciples, and that they will be witnesses of the gospel (John 15:18-17).

In the beginning of Chapter 14 Thomas inquires, "Lord we do not know where you're going. How can we know the way?" Jesus responds, "I am the way, the truth, and

¹²¹For an exposition of the farewell discourse, see D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Jesus’ claim of exclusivity demonstrates that he is the culmination of all revelation, and anyone who knows God the Father knows him through Jesus the Son. The only way to know the Father is through the Son because the Son is the self-revelation and representative of the Father. Carson notes, “indeed, the test of whether or not the Jews in Jesus’s day, and in John’s day, really knew God through the revelation that had already been disclosed, lay in their response to the supreme revelation from the Father, Jesus Christ himself, to which the Scriptures, properly understood, invariably point.”¹²² Not only was that an important test in Jesus’ day, but also the same test applies today. If one knows the Son, one knows the Father. It is at this point that Philip directs his question to the Lord, sparking the episode described in John 14:8-11:

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

The subject of the present exchange between Jesus and his disciples is one of the central themes of the Gospel of John: the unity between the Father and Son. Köstenberger notes, “What is at stake here is nothing less than Jesus’s ability to provide first-hand revelation of God.”¹²³ However, it appears that even the disciples, specifically Philip, have not yet grasped that in Jesus, God is making himself known. It is the ignorance of the disciples that prompts Philip’s inquiry for an immediate display of God the Father. Carson notes, “He thus joins the queue of human beings through the ages who have rightly understood

¹²²Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 401.

¹²³Köstenberger, *John*, 431. Köstenberger goes on to comment that John’s presentation of the relationship between the Father and Son clearly implies ontological unity (unity of being); but the emphasis lies on functional unity, that is, the way in which God is revealed in Jesus’ words and works. *Ibid.*, 432.

that there can be no higher experience, no greater good, than seeing God as he is, in unimaginable splendor and transcendent glory.”¹²⁴

Philip’s request is not out of line with many contemporary Jews, who in Jesus’ day were longing for a first-hand experience of God.¹²⁵ The question demonstrates that the disciples, and certainly Philip himself, have missed one of the Gospel of John’s most significant themes: that in Christ, God the Father has graciously, definitively, gloriously, and visibly disclosed himself. To see Jesus is to see his Father because he is the content and mediator of the Father’s communicative endeavors.

The result of the disciples’ ignorance seems to have saddened, or at least surprised, Jesus. Jesus’ response to Philip’s question is “staggering in its simplicity and its profundity,” remarks Morris.¹²⁶ Perhaps what is more important than Philip’s inquiry itself is that it presents Jesus another opportunity to reveal himself.¹²⁷ Michaels argues, “the reply to Philip is a corollary of everything Jesus has said in the first half of the Gospel about his dependence on the Father, speaking only what the Father had given him to say and doing only what the Father commissioned him to do.”¹²⁸ An essential component to the ministry of Christ is to reveal the Father. It is also important to note that Jesus’ revelation of the Father is mediated through Jesus’ words and works (John 5:20, 36; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38).

Jesus, in light of Philip’s inquiry, asks his followers what their perception is of the relationship between the Father and the Son and he alludes to the mutual indwelling of the Father and Son.¹²⁹ Jesus uses spatial terminology (ἐν) to describe the mutual

¹²⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 402.

¹²⁵Köstenberger, *John*, 431.

¹²⁶Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 572.

¹²⁷Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 777.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹The doctrine of mutual indwelling (περιχώρησις/*circumincessio*) refers to the doctrine that

indwelling that characterizes the relationship between the Father and Son (John 14:10, 11, 20). Once again, Jesus maintains that the authority with which he speaks is an authority that is given to him by his Father. Even the works that the Son accomplishes are works that are given to him by his Father. Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on the mutual words and works of the Father and the Son described in this passage, reasons,

If, he [the Son] would say, my Father had spoken anything to you, he would not have used any other words than these that I am now speaking. For so great is the equality in essence between myself and him that my words are his words, and what ever I do may be believed to be his actions. For, because he abides in me, by reason of the exact equivalence in essence, he himself does the works. For since the Godhead is one in the Father, and the Son, and in the spirit, every word that comes from the Father comes always through the Son and by the Spirit. Every work or miracle is through the Son, by the Spirit and yet it is considered as coming from the Father. For the Son is not apart from the essence of the Father, nor indeed is the Holy Spirit. But the Son, being in the Father and having the Father again in himself, claims that the Father is the doer of the works. For the nature of the Father is mighty in operation and shined out clearly in the Son.¹³⁰

This passage demonstrates that when Jesus' followers want direct revelation from the Father, all they have to do is listen to the Word of the Son, because the Father is dwelling in him (ὁ δὲ Πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων). Thus, the Son is continually portrayed as the Father's authoritative mediator and revealer.

Revelation 1:1-3

The opening sentences of the book of Revelation are important to consider because they show that Jesus, after his ascension, still functions as the subject and mediator of the Father's speech. The first three verses of the book of Revelation, the verses considered here, serve as a foreword to the rest of the book. A typical foreword, following ancient literary conventions, states not only the author, but also the purpose

each member of the Godhead indwells or interpenetrates the other without confusion of personal distinction (Jn 14:9-11; 17:21). This doctrine refers primarily to the coinherence of the persons of the Trinity in the divine essence and in each other. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 67.

¹³⁰Cyril of Alexandria, "Commentary on John," in *Book 6, A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, vol. 2 (London: N.p., 1885), 262.

and contents of the book. Furthermore, the author's goal is to establish credibility by commenting on the reliability of his or her message and the trustworthiness of the source. However, this foreword seems to have several unique features not typical of other forewords in ancient literature.

The foreword of the book of Revelation contains an expanded and highly theological preface that alludes to trinitarian operations. Its purpose is to establish, from the very beginning, the *divine* authority behind its composition. John clearly wants to communicate that what follows is not merely a set of his visions, but is the result of divine inspiration from God through Jesus. The text reads as follows:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

The opening expression of the book, “revelation of Jesus Christ,” is a highly important phrase for understanding the revelatory agency of the Son. The phrase, “The revelation of Jesus Christ,” (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) can have either objective or subjective force and most commentators agree that it likely is both.¹³¹ This means that the Son is both the subject of revelation and the author of revelation. Revelation presents Jesus as “both the revealer and the revealed,” notes Mangina.¹³² Hence, Christ is set within the chain of revelation, so that he is the agent through whom the Father reveals.¹³³ The Father is the ultimate source of revelation, and Christ, the agent of revelation, transmits the Father's word to believers. Therefore, God the Father is the source of the

¹³¹See Davie E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 12; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 52; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 183.

¹³²Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 40.

¹³³Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 183.

revelatory content, which is mediated through Jesus Christ. God, through Christ, is author and revealer.

The word Αποκάλυψις means an uncovering of something hidden in order to make fully known.¹³⁴ Jesus, as the agent of the Father is able to reveal that which was previously hidden and unknown because he is a trustworthy author.

Furthermore, Osborne maintains, “John wants the reader to understand from the outset that Jesus Christ who became incarnate, revealed himself in the flesh, died on the cross, and rose again, is the one who mediates the visions in this book.”¹³⁵ Jesus’ revelatory agency does not cease after his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is an eloquent ruler continually dispensing the Word that he received from the Father. Osborne further notes, “The Fourth Gospel contains a progression similar to the progression of this verse, for there too the Father ‘shows’ the Son ‘all he does’ (5:20), and the Son in turn ‘shows’ these works to the Jews (10:32).”¹³⁶

The purpose of this revelation is for God the Father, through his mediator Jesus Christ, to show Christ’s servants, the church, all that will take place. Similarly, as in the previous passages, an emphasis is placed on those who hear the message and keep what is written in it. Therefore, Jesus, from the heavens, is still the authoritative mediator of the Father’s Word.

These passages give a small glimpse into the eternal life of the triune God and a glimpse into triune authorial agency. Trinitarian communicative activity features God the Son, the Word incarnate, who speaks to us in ordinary human words, words that he has heard from his Father within the eternal life of the Trinity and in the economy of

¹³⁴Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 112.

¹³⁵Osborne, *Revelation*, 52.

¹³⁶Ibid., 54.

salvation. The Son's relational subsistence is to know and reveal the Father. The Words that he speaks, all of them, are authoritative because as mediating agent of the Father and as the incarnate Son he is the Word of the Father.

How, then, do the dogmatic categories of sonship and incarnation, along with the biblical testimony of the Son's speech, contribute to an evangelical and trinitarian account of biblical authority?

The Authoritative Word: The Son's Speech and the Authority of Scripture

Having considered the theological implications of sonship and the incarnation as well as the nature of the Son's authoritative speech in Scripture, it is important to draw several theological conclusions regarding biblical authority. This account of biblical authority related to the communicative agency of Jesus will consider three important concepts: the eternal Word and the authority of Scripture; the theological implications of accommodation, the incarnation, and the authority of Scripture; and the relationship between the resurrection and ascension of the Son and biblical authority. Each of these aspects of the Son's activity must be considered because, as Carl Henry comments, "The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos – preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified."¹³⁷ These dogmatic points will demonstrate that the Son is always the authoritative mediatorial *agent* through whom the Father speaks and the authoritative *content* of the Father's speech.

The Eternal Word and the Authority of Scripture

The Bible is authoritative because it is the revelation from the eternal Son about the eternal Son. The Son is not simply the mediator of the Word by virtue of his

¹³⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 164.

incarnation, but his authorial agency is connected to his eternal relation to the Father, specifically in the Son's mode of subsistence as eternally begotten. The eternal Word, the one who has existed in an eternal filial relationship with the Father, is the one who can authoritatively and accurately reveal (John 1:1; 5:24). By virtue of understanding the perfection and authority of the pre-incarnate, eternal, Logos, we can confess that the Word that the Father speaks is always authoritative and perfect. The Father has never uttered a Word that is not mediated by the Son. As the eternal Logos (John 1:3) or the eternal Son (Col 1:13-16) is set forth in the New Testament as the divine mediator in creation, so also the Logos is declared to be God's mediator in every divine revelation.

All that the Father does is through the agency of the Son, because revelation is only given through and by the Logos of God.¹³⁸ Henry claims, "In view of the identity of the preexistent Christ with the Logos, all revelation in the broad sense is therefore Christological."¹³⁹ The eternal Son, having existed in the eternal joyous fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally knows and reveals the Father. He is, therefore, the revelatory facilitator and the subject matter of revelation. Jesus makes this point on the road to Emmaus as he contends, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The Christ event is not merely a special episode within a larger panorama of revelation. The Father reveals and speaks the Son from all eternity. All revelation is mediated by the Logos of God, who continually discloses the reality, eternal power and glory of God throughout the created universe.¹⁴⁰ An account of biblical authority, of God's self-disclosure in Scripture, must take into consideration the authorial agency of the Son

¹³⁸Ibid., 3:205.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 206.

precisely because he is the eternal Son and the Son's authorship perfectly corresponds to his mode of subsistence.

The Incarnation, Accommodation, and the Authority of Scripture

As previously noted, the relationship between incarnation and inscripturation is a frequent point of contention in evangelical theology. Simply, in what sense are the two uses of the phrase "Word of God" related? Nobody seriously argues that the two Words of God are univocal, so the contention is whether they are analogous, and if so in what way, or equivocal. Nigel M. de S. Cameron argues, "Unless these two are considered – which they plainly are not – to be identical, or unless 'Word of God' is considered a mere homonym with two independent significations, we must hold that some kind of analogical relationship exists between the two usages, and, therefore, between the two *loci* to which the term 'Word of God' refers."¹⁴¹ The circumstance that the same term, the Word of God, is used in Scripture to denote both the Eternal Son and the revelation contained in the Bible, is itself sufficient to call attention to the analogy.¹⁴²

The Bible is authoritative because as God's authoritative mediating agent, and as the content of the Father's disclosure, Jesus continues to speak a perfect Word. Swain notes, "God speaks to us in our language in this book as a consequence of his covenant of purpose. God desires to be our God and to make us his people. . . . God condescends to us in covenant communication because God condescends to us in covenant friendship. And friends speak the same language."¹⁴³ He further notes, "God's condescension to speak to

¹⁴¹Cameron, "Incarnation and Inscripturation," 35. For further reading, see J. H. Crehan, "The Analogy between Verbum Dei Incarnatum and Verbum Dei Scripturum in the Fathers," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6, no. 1 (1955): 87–90; G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 199.

¹⁴²James Bannerman, *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2009), 465.

¹⁴³Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 69.

us by human mouths in human language no more compromises the divine glory of his speech than his condescension to assume human form in the incarnation compromise the divine glory of his person.”¹⁴⁴

Therefore, it is not erroneous to draw an analogous comparison between incarnation and Scripture, but it is erroneous to attribute error to either. Richard Muller points out, “God does not accommodate his truth to human sin — rather he accommodates his truth to human ways of knowing.”¹⁴⁵ Jesus is God’s Son in the flesh, and the Bible is God’s word in human form. Both the incarnation and inscripturation are accommodated forms of divine communication, but this accommodation does not entail faults, since both are the Word of God. In the incarnation, the human and divine natures are not active agents, but rather the person of Christ acts in and through his human and divine natures. Analogously, in inscripturation the human and divine words are not to be separated, but we are to understand the Bible as God’s Word. To claim that the error of Docetism is committed in failing to attribute human error to Scripture is similar to claiming that one who confesses the sinlessness of Christ is a Docetic. The humanity of Scripture does not entail error in Scripture any more than it entails a sinful Savior. The human element of Scripture entails that God has accommodated himself to a human way of comprehending. Cameron argues that the an evangelical confession of biblical authority is inherently linked to a proper Christology:

In the teaching of Jesus Christ we see the production of human language as the fruit of the *unio hypostatica*, and we find a point of contact between the human side of both prime and secondary analogates: both analogous relations bring about human speech, and the speech of Jesus Christ is in part incorporated within the speech which makes up Holy Scripture. The two are therefore comparable, and free the analogy from the charge of helplessness in actual theological questions. The

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 70.

¹⁴⁵Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, in *Holy Scripture*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 261.

question of the infallibility of Holy Scripture takes on a distinctly Christological significance.¹⁴⁶

In the incarnation the God-man speaks the Word of God perfectly and authoritatively. Thus, the words of a man are incorporated into the Word of God.

Since the Bible is God's accommodated speech, its form fits its function by communicating the unfolding drama of Christ and covenant. The Word that the Father speaks for the purpose of revelation is capable of accommodation, but not error, as all divine revelation mediated to man is accommodated.

On the one hand, Jesus' audience in the Gospels continually questions the authority and accuracy of his message because they do not believe that God can reveal himself in an accommodated manner. Evangelicalism, on the other hand, is marked by many revisionist understandings of Scripture that do not believe that God's accommodated revelation in the Scripture can be authoritative and accurate. It is noted that in the Gospel of John, what is at stake is Jesus' ability to provide a first-hand account of divine revelation. Similarly, what is at stake in biblical authority is Jesus' ability to be the content and mediator of the Father's speech. The Son, by virtue of his mode of subsistence, is the one who accurately and authoritatively reveals the Father. Bannerman notes, "All Christ's words were, in the highest and strictest sense of the terms, the words of God, and no less the words of a man."¹⁴⁷ God himself speaks when the God-man speaks in human speech.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, an evangelical theology of biblical authority argues that the Bible is mediated through the God-Man. Jesus demonstrates that he is able to accurately reveal the Father (John 7:28; 8:26).¹⁴⁹ Cameron notes, "If the teaching of

¹⁴⁶ Cameron, "Incarnation and Inscripturation: The Christological Analogy in Light of Recent Discussion," 45.

¹⁴⁷ Bannerman, *Inspiration*, 467.

¹⁴⁸ Karl Barth, *The Revelation of God: The Incarnation of the Word*, Study ed., vol. 1.2.3, Church Dogmatics (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 51.

¹⁴⁹ Cameron, "Incarnation and Inscripturation," 45.

Jesus Christ is infallible, then so must be the teaching of Holy Scripture.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Bible is authoritative because it is the speech of the eternal Logos, who, to make his Father known, assumed a human nature in order to speak an authoritative and accommodated Word.

The Resurrection and Ascension of the Son and the Authority of Scripture

The articulate ministry of the eternal Logos does not cease with his death, burial, and ascension, but as exalted King he continues to speak an authoritative Word to the church. Thus, the Bible is authoritative because Jesus continues to speak the Word of his Father. It is in Scripture that Christ continues to speak words of truth about his Father. Jesus is not mute or silent; he still speaks, and all that he speaks is received from his Father (Rev 1:1-3).

Evangelical accounts of biblical authority must take into account the present and ongoing ministry of Christ. Any failure to speak of the ongoing ministry of the Son is an implicit denial of the resurrection, ascension, and ongoing mediatorial activity of the Son. Athanasius notes, “We are agreed that a dead person can do nothing: yet the Savior works mightily every day, drawing men to religion, persuading them to virtue, teaching them about immortality, quickening their thirst for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring strength in the face of death, manifesting Himself to each, and displacing the religion of idols.”¹⁵¹ An ontology of Scripture must account for the current ministry of the Son because, as the gospel teaches, he is not dead. According to John Webster, in his resurrection and ascension Christ continues to address his creation by, “shedding abroad the knowledge of himself.”¹⁵² In Scripture the risen Lord makes

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 61–62.

¹⁵² J. B. Webster, *The Domain of the Word* (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 35.

himself known, a truth which must be brought to bear on the ontology of Scripture. Christ, then, is *still* the eternal mediating agent and content of the Father's authoritative speech. Consequently, in Scripture, Christ, seated at the right hand of God, guides us to himself by mediating the Word to us. Therefore, Christians bow to the authority and Lordship of Christ by bowing to the authority of Scripture.¹⁵³

Therefore, any investigation of the Bible is, as Webster notes, "properly directed toward attending to the text as the risen one's address in the present; to interpret the text is to hear it as the Lord's word."¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, "Scripture is what it is by virtue of its place in the divine economy over which the risen Christ presides and in which he reveals himself."¹⁵⁵ Thus, our reading is also a hearing, a hearing of the Father's Word spoken to us by the Son. It is the risen and authoritative Word who speaks to us his Father's Word.

As Henry argues, "God's revelation rests in Jesus Christ alone – not simply in his incarnational activities between 6 B.C. and A.D. 30, but in participation of the eternal Son within the divine Triunity."¹⁵⁶ Therefore, in the Bible, the risen Christ declares and exercises his kingly rule. Scripture is both the announcement of the reality of his exaltation to the right hand of the Father and itself an instrument through which his governance is exercised. In Scripture, the church encounters its head.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 97.

¹⁵⁴Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 43.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 38. Webster goes on to define the nature of Scripture as the "creaturely auxiliary of the exalted Lord's self-proclamation" (*ibid.*).

¹⁵⁶Henry, *The God Who Speaks and Shows*, 3:206.

¹⁵⁷Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 46–47.

The Bible is authoritative because it has been, is, and will continue to be spoken by Christ. He, was, is, and will continue to be the authoritative speaker of God's revelation. Christ still speaks a living, life-giving word.¹⁵⁸

Given the dogmatic claims of sonship and incarnation, the biblical testimony concerning the Son's speech, and the eternal authoritative revelatory action of the Son in eternity past, the incarnation, and the resurrection, how should one appraise the proposals of Enns and Sparks? Does Enns's proposal of the Christological analogy (parallel) as it relates to the nature of biblical criticism and biblical authority properly take into consideration the authorial activity of the Son? Does Sparks's proposal of the divine adoption of the Bible, a creaturely document, consider the implications of Jesus' communicative activity? This chapter has argued that not only is the Bible authoritative because it has God the Father as its ultimate source, but that the Bible is also authoritative because it has the eternal Logos, the Son, as its authoritative mediator and content. This argument has been made in light of other evangelical proposals that have attempted to appropriate other language in their appeals to biblical authority. The Son authors the Bible in accordance with the mode of his subsistence – as Son. This project will now consider, in turn the proposals of both Enns and Sparks in light of the dogmatic, biblical and theological claims presented in this chapter.

Enns is correct to contend that our doctrine of Scripture must take into account the creaturely characteristic of the text. Any Christian understanding of the Bible must recognize that, though God is the author of the Bible, so too are the human authors. As Warfield notes,

When the Christian asserts his faith in the divine origin of his Bible, he does not mean to deny that it was composed and written by men or that it was given by men to the world. He believes that the marks of its human origin are ineradicably

¹⁵⁸Donald Macleod, "Jesus and Scripture," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 95.

stamped on every page of the whole volume. He means to state only that it is not merely human in its origin.¹⁵⁹

In inscription, the Word of the Father, mediated through the Son, is expressed through genuinely human thoughts, will, context, and language. Therefore, Enns is right to underscore that the divine Word is also a human word. Evangelical theology cannot afford to acquiesce to this crucial insight.

However, Warfield notes that it is a mistake to piece out the human and divine elements of Scripture and divine elements. He argues,

It would be inexact to say that [the N. T. authors] recognize a human element in Scripture: they do not parcel Scripture out, assigning portions of it, or elements in it, respectively to God and man. In their view the whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements, down to the least minutiae, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God; but the whole of it has been given by God through the instrumentality of men. There is, therefore, in their view, not, indeed, a human element or ingredient in Scripture, and much less human divisions or sections of Scripture, but a human side or aspect to Scripture; and they do not fail to give full recognition to this human side or aspect.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, when the Christian confesses that the Bible is Scripture, they are confessing that it is both a divine Word and a human word. God and man are co-authors.¹⁶¹ Enns's use of the incarnational analogy betrays a stunted and ill-informed Christology, a Christ that is prone to error and perhaps even sin. Informed with these Christological presuppositions it is not a surprise that his incarnational doctrine of Scripture is equally erroneous. Since all of Jesus' words, works, and experiences are the words, works, and experiences of God the Son, so too every word of Scripture is the Word of God.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 429.

¹⁶⁰Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1980), 150.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 173. For two helpful chapters on the nature of human language and divine inspiration, see J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 194–226; Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 229–66.

¹⁶²For more on the sufficiency of human language in divine revelation see, Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 219.

Despite Enns's attempt to demonstrate the relationship between the incarnation of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible in an effort to show the raw humanity of the Bible, Enns has overstepped the usefulness of the analogy, and in an important sense misunderstood the force and intention of the analogy. His appropriation of the incarnational analogy goes far beyond how it is traditionally used. In fact, the way he appropriates the analogy proves that not only does he have a faulty view of the Bible, but also a flawed Christology. Specifically, given Enns's use of the inspiration of Scripture, what does that say about what he believes about the incarnation of Christ? For Enns, it appears that the Son does not remain the Son in the incarnation, or, as Kenotic Christology maintains, perhaps the Son divests himself of any, or all, divine identity and prerogative in the assumption of human nature. Chalcedonian Christology does not permit the theological latitude that Enns asserts. Packer notes, "If the critics believe that Scripture, as a human book, errs, they ought, by the force of their own analogy, to believe also that Christ, as man, sinned."¹⁶³ Enns argues that the incarnational nature of the Bible "does not imply a disconnectedness to its environment."¹⁶⁴ While that is true, it is equally true that in the incarnation Christ assumed a human nature while at the same time remaining the eternal Son.

Packer argues that the evangelical approach to Scripture corresponds to Christological orthodoxy, and the theology of evangelical critics belongs to the Nestorian heresy:

Nestorianism begins by postulating a distinction between Jesus as a man and the divine Son whom it regards as someone distinct, indwelling the man; but then it cannot conceive of the real personal identity of the man and his son. The right scriptural way in Christology is to start by recognizing the unity of the Lord's person as divine and to view his humanity only as an aspect of his person, existing within it and never, therefore, disassociated from it. Similarly, the right way to think

¹⁶³J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 83.

¹⁶⁴Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 168.

of Scripture is to start from the biblical idea that the written Scriptures as such are the “oracles of God,” and to study their character as a human book only is one aspect of their character as a divine book. Those who start postulating a distinction between the Bible as a human book in the word of God that is in it are unable, on their own premises, to recognize and exhibit their real oneness of these two things, and when they try to state their mutual relationship they lapsed into arbitrary subjectivism.¹⁶⁵

Enns, with his insistence on the human agency of inscripturation appears to be separating the divine and human authors to such an extreme that he may be subject to the critique of a kind of scriptural Nestorianism. Though there are two authors of Scripture, divine and human, there are not two Words, but only one. God’s condescension, then, in both incarnation and inscripturation, brought about the full union and identity of divine with human, with salvation being the goal.¹⁶⁶ Thus, in order to properly account for the incarnational analogy, one must correctly understand Christology. As has already been demonstrated, the dogmatic categories of sonship and incarnation speak directly to this issue. Christ, the eternal Son, assumed a human nature, while remaining the Son. In order for Enns’s incarnational analogy to work, he would have to deny several creedal Christological categories.

A trinitarian account of biblical authority asserts that the Bible is authoritative because the Father has spoken an authoritative word in the Son. A trinitarian account of biblical authority rightly emphasizes the historical situatedness of the Bible while also confessing the theological situatedness of God’s communicative activity. The Son, as demonstrated in the incarnation, is the authoritative content and mediator of the Father’s speech. He speaks an authoritative Word in harmony with this mode of subsistence. Thus, his authorial agency is to be the content the mediator of his Father’s speech. Therefore, evangelical theology can be buttressed by an account of trinitarian communicative activity while denying the errors presented in Enns’s incarnational analogy.

¹⁶⁵Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles*, 83–4.

¹⁶⁶ Packer, “The Adequacy of Human Language,” 219.

Sparks's proposal hinges on the assumption that God, though perfect himself, does not necessarily need to speak perfectly, but only adequately, to adequate interpreters. He argues that evangelicals have placed an unnecessarily high expectation on Scripture that is drawn solely from logical deduction, not biblical evidence. He, much like Enns, wants to emphasize that the Bible is a divine and human document. However, his understanding of inscripturated accommodation is radically different from traditional proposals. He argues that it is a divine document only insofar as God accommodates himself to adopt a human document. Informed by his assumptions about humanity he maintains that even Jesus himself erred, so how could the Bible, a human document, be excluded from having human characteristics. Sparks argues, "If Jesus as a finite human being erred from time to time, there is no reason at all to suppose that Moses, Paul, John wrote Scripture without error. Rather, we are wise to assume that the biblical authors expressed themselves as human beings writing from the perspectives of their own finite, broken horizons."¹⁶⁷ In this one sentence, Sparks betrays a substandard Christology that must be rejected. His insistence on adoptionistic language reveals a doctrine of Scripture that is foreign to Christian theology, for God does not have an adopted Son (Christology), or an adopted Word (bibliology). Both the Word incarnate and the Word inscribed are his. As has been demonstrated through the categories of Sonship and incarnation, and in the biblical witness itself, Jesus, God's eternally begotten Son, speaks truthfully and accurately because the Word that he speaks is from his Father.

One of Sparks's biggest mistakes is that he charges evangelicalism with a faulty commitment to Cartesian epistemology — which assumes that human beings have the capacity to see the world as God sees it — as untenable. His own system of biblical criticism requires the same commitment to Cartesian epistemology. In other words, in his adoption of biblical criticism Sparks merely exchanges one epistemological authority for

¹⁶⁷ Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 7.

another. He exchanges revelation for human observation. Sparks calls on evangelicals to search for a canon (higher criticism) within a canon (revelation), which is an approach evangelicals have consistently opposed. In effect, “he argues for a new priesthood made up of historical-critical scholars,” notes Keathley.¹⁶⁸ He continually argues that human beings are finite and fallen and that therefore the Bible’s human discourse participates in an accommodated and adequate, yet limited and imperfect, economy of meaning. He is unable, unfortunately, to realize that biblical criticism falls prey to this same argument.

Contrary to Sparks’s claims, evangelicals are not imprisoned by Cartesian epistemology but are bound to a distinctly Christian metaphysic – a metaphysic that requires us to believe certain things about God’s communicative activity. This metaphysic, based on the historic confession of trinitarian activity and God’s actions in Christ is that God the Father always speaks a perfect and authoritative Word, which is always mediated by the divine Son, which even in an accommodated form is still God’s Word. Evangelicals affirm with Irenaeus: “The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit.”¹⁶⁹ Contrary to Sparks’ proposal, a Trinitarian theology of biblical authority confesses that the Son is the author who reveals and mediates his Father’s Word.

In an increasingly secular and post-Christian world, general comments and affirmations about God’s Word being authoritative, inspired, clear, and inerrant are inadequate. Christians, in their appeals to biblical inspiration and authority, must speak clearly about God the Father speaking through God the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Generic gods do not speak authoritatively, but the Christian God does.

The incarnation teaches that our knowledge of God does not begin with our

¹⁶⁸Keathley, “God’s Word in Human Words,” 201.

¹⁶⁹Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1:28.2.

mental assent, but rather with God's authoritative self-revelation in the person and work of Christ, and therefore, the incarnation must be considered an essential paradigm for understanding God's communicative activity. God's accommodated self-revelation carries with it the same authority as the words of Christ. The Bible, being the very words of the eternal Logos, who assumed human nature, and after his death and resurrection ascended to the right hand of God, is authoritative because it is the Son's Word given to us by the Son from the Father. The Son, continuing his ministry of eloquence, reveals himself to us in his authoritative word.

Therefore, biblical authority must be dogmatically rooted in the Father's speech and the Son's authorship. The Son speaks with the same authority as the Father, since his act of speaking derives from his Father. The eternally begotten Son is not only an authoritative speaker, but he is also the authoritative content of divine speech. It is Christ the eternally authoritative Word of the Father who makes himself known to us. Therefore, trinitarian communicative agency means the Son was, is, and will always be a speaker.

The Bible is authoritative because in it we see Christ's perspective on reality. He gives us the Word that he has received from the Father (John 17:8) In Scripture, then, we gain insight into who his Father is, how he speaks, and what he has spoken. Furthermore, the Bible is authoritative because Jesus, the Son, is an authoritative author. He always mediates the authoritative Word of the Father. Therefore, in relation to trinitarian communicative activity, and specifically in relation to the Son's authoritative speech, the Bible is authoritative because it has the Father as its source and the Son as its mediator and content. Because its overall subject matter is Christ, the Bible's content is of universal, and therefore permanent, relevance. As J. Todd Billings notes, "The Word of the triune God is not the word of a generic God, but the Word of God who has shows himself gracious and forgiving in the person of Jesus Christ, and who desires and creates

fellowship with those who are in Christ by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷⁰ The Bible is authoritative because what God communicates is Jesus Christ and how God communicates is through Jesus Christ.

¹⁷⁰J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 89.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROCESSION OF THE SPIRIT AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

This dissertation has argued that the Bible is authoritative because it is the triune God's Word. To this point it has been established that the Bible is authoritative because God the Father initiates the triune act of authoritative speech, and the Son, the Father's Word, is both the content and mediator of the Father's speech. This chapter will consider the authorial agency of God the Spirit – specifically, how an appeal to the person and work of the Spirit can strengthen an evangelical account of biblical authority?

How can the Spirit, the one who proceeds from the Father and the Son, be an authoritative speaker? How does the work of the Spirit impact the ontology of Scripture? This chapter will argue that the Bible is authoritative because it is breathed out by the Spirit who, being spoken by the Father and Son, is the authorial agent who brings about the divine intentions and effects of the triune God, by teaching the Word that he receives from the Father and Son.

In order to demonstrate the significance of the Spirit's authorial agency for biblical authority, this chapter first explores two representative accounts of biblical authority from the evangelical tradition. Second, it presents a dogmatic account of the procession of the Spirit in order to explore how the Spirit's procession relates to an account of biblical authority. Third, this chapter investigates various biblical texts that appropriate authority and authoritative communication to God the Spirit. Five biblical texts are explored: John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:12-15, 1 Cor 2:6-16, 2 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Pet 1:16-21. Fourth, having explored the dogmatic account of God the Spirit and the biblical account of the Spirit's authorial agency, this chapter concludes by presenting

a theological account of biblical authority that understands God the Spirit to be the one who completes all of the authorial intentions of the triune God.

The Authority of Scripture and the Work of the Spirit: Soundings from Evangelicalism

The two representatives of evangelicalism that will be considered in this chapter are N. T. Wright and the late Stanley Grenz. Both theologians have written extensively and thoughtfully on the doctrine of Scripture; thus, both of their accounts are worthy of being considered. As in previous chapters, specific attention will be given to how they appropriate the doctrine of God in their accounts of biblical authority.

N. T. Wright

N. T. Wright's most recent work that discusses biblical authority is *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today*.¹ This book provides insight into Wright's current thinking on the subject of biblical authority. Wright explores questions such as, how can there be such a thing as an authoritative book, by what means does the Bible actually exercise its authority, and what is biblical authority?

Before examining his major argument for biblical authority, it is important to note that one of Wright's major contentions is that Christians have largely misunderstood what biblical authority actually is. A major theme that characterizes many of Wright's works is the contention that "usual views of the Bible—including usual evangelical views of the Bible—are actually too low, and do not give it the sufficient weight it ought to have."² Wright sees most of the current dialogue about biblical authority as insubstantial. He maintains, "It is sad to report that a good deal of debate is conducted at a shallow and

¹N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2013). While this work is a recent publication, it is an updated and revised version of his previously published book, N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005).

²N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (January, 1991): 7.

trivializing level – which ought to be remarkable, considering how much work has been done on the relevant questions.”³ However, Wright maintains that there is reason for optimism concerning the conversation related to biblical authority. He believes that some contemporary work on biblical authority indicates that there are serious theologians who are beginning to concern themselves with whole question of what Scripture is, how to read it with cultural and intellectual alertness and integrity, and how to enable it to be what it ought to be in the life and mission of the church.⁴ Wright’s purpose in this book, then, is to provide clarity and substance that he believes is lacking from much of the evangelical conversation as it relates to biblical authority.

How Can There Be an Authoritative Book?

According to Wright, it is impossible to understand biblical authority without first properly understanding divine authority. He argues that one of the major reasons evangelicals have misunderstood biblical authority is because they have a distorted view of authority in the first place. He maintains that the contemporary concept of authority is often used as a means to control and regulate doctrine, ethics, and people, which is a

³Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 18.

⁴Ibid., 19. The works that Wright lists in this category include: Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); J. B. Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

departure from how the Bible is meant to function authoritatively. He argues that the contemporary notion of authority “runs into all kinds of problems when we apply it to the Bible.”⁵ Wright continues, “Most of the Bible does not consist of rules and regulations — with commands to be obeyed. Nor does it consist of creeds — lists of things to be believed. . . . One might even say, in one sense, that there is no biblical doctrine of the authority of the Bible.”⁶ Thus, for Wright the theological conception of biblical authority that characterizes much of the evangelical landscape is foreign to the Bible itself.

How, then, if the Bible ascribes all authority to God, can the Bible, a book, be authoritative? Wright contends that in the Bible all authority is ascribed to God (Phil 2:9-11). Consequently, according to Wright, the authority of Scripture is shorthand for God’s authority exercised *through* Scripture. For Wright, this is the major issue that has prevented evangelicals from capturing a proper understanding of biblical authority.

The authority of Scripture, according to Wright, “can have Christian meaning only if we are referring to Scripture’s authority in a delegated or mediated sense from that which God himself possesses and that which Jesus possesses as the risen Lord and Son of God, the Immanuel.”⁷ Therefore, Wright believes that any Christian account of biblical authority must maintain that the Bible serves as God’s authoritative proxy as he uses it to accomplish his purposes.

How Does the Bible Exercise Authority?

Wright believes that the concept of authority has been misunderstood as consisting of rules, regulations, creeds, and moral imperatives. According to Wright, the Bible is not necessarily authoritative in that sense; rather, the Bible functions

⁵Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 11.

⁶Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?,” 11.

⁷Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 23.

authoritatively as a narrative. To speak properly about biblical authority one must speak of the Bible as narratively authoritative. He attempts to demonstrate this thesis by exploring how Scripture functioned in the life of Israel. Wright believes that the delegated and mediated form of God's authority is placed in the proper context when the narrative of Israel's story is considered: God, evil, rescue, and restoration.⁸ He argues that in the life of Israel, "Scripture was never simply about imparting information, reminding people of previous religious experience. . . . It was written to shape and direct the life of God's people."⁹ According to Wright, Israel understood the overall story of Scripture to be authoritative for their lives. The life of Israel was to be governed by this narrative. Scripture existed to "generate once more the sense of Israel as the people called by YHWH for his purposes in the world, so that the writing and the telling of the story formed the further living embodiment of YHWH's call and promise."¹⁰ Scripture was written to shape and direct the life of God's people. For Wright, God equips Israel to accomplish his purposes through Scripture, and it is in Scripture that Israel understands its purpose.

Having considered how God's authority functioned in the life of Israel through Scripture, Wright also contends that a proper understanding of God's authority must consider the relationship between Scripture and Jesus. The life and ministry of Jesus are the culminating events of the story of Scripture. Wright argues, "In and through Jesus evil is confronted and judged, and forgiveness and renewal are brought to birth. The covenant is renewed; new creation is inaugurated." Therefore, "The work which God had done through Scripture in the Old Testament is done by Jesus in his public career, his death, and resurrection, and his sending of the Spirit."¹¹ He continues, "Jesus thus does,

⁸Ibid., 34.

⁹Ibid., 38.

¹⁰Ibid., 34.

¹¹Ibid., 42.

climactically and decisively, what Scripture had in a sense been trying to do: bring God's fresh Kingdom-Order to God's people and thence to the world. He is, in that sense as well as others, the Word made flesh." Jesus, then, is the ultimate Word of God. It is the Christ story that now functions narratively as the authoritative story for the people of God.

Wright continues his argument by maintaining that the narrational understanding of biblical authority that was evident in the life of Israel and Jesus continues in the life of the early church. He argues that in the early church the concept of the 'Word of God' was understood to be the fulfillment of Old Testament promises and a call to accept the Spirit's life-changing power and authority in the present:

We have the roots of a fully Christian theology of scriptural authority: planted firmly in the soil of the missionary community, confronting the powers of the world with the news of the Kingdom of God, refreshed and invigorated by the Spirit, growing particularly through the preaching and teaching of the apostles, and bearing fruit in the transformation of human lives as the start of God's project with the whole cosmos to rights.¹²

According to the early church, God accomplishes all of these things through the story of Scripture. Furthermore, the early church understood the ministry of the "Word," not simply as a recording about the coming of God's Kingdom into the world, but as a *means* whereby that happened.¹³ The earliest Christians believed that God's Word was at work by the Spirit within the community to put Jesus' achievement into full effect and thus to advance the final kingdom. So, for Wright, to speak properly of biblical authority, one must speak of the Bible as the authoritative means by which God was, and is, bringing about his new creation.

Nevertheless, according to Wright, the proper conception of biblical authority was lost throughout the course of church history and was substituted for various, less

¹²Ibid., 50.

¹³Ibid., 51.

adequate doctrines of biblical authority. He argues that the dynamic notion of Scripture as the vehicle of God's kingdom coming to the world gave way to other notions of Scriptural authority. The Bible became "detached from its narrative context and thereby isolated from both the gift and goal of the Kingdom."¹⁴ The notion that biblical authority was understood as God working powerfully through the Scripture in order to bring about the kingdom was gradually lost.

Biblical authority was partially recovered during the Reformation. The insistence on *sola scriptura* recovered several aspects of how the Bible functioned authoritatively. Through an emphasis on the literal sense of Scripture and the ability of ordinary Christians to read Scripture for themselves, "God's word could once again do a fresh work in the hearts and lives of ordinary people."¹⁵ However, Wright argues that though the Reformers were instrumental in recovering aspects of biblical authority, there were also several aspects that remained lost, particularly how God *uses* Scripture authoritatively.

Anything that was gained in the Reformation was lost again in the Enlightenment. The overall narrative of human progress that characterized the Enlightenment was antithetical to the narrative of Scripture. Wright points out that it produced a distinctly alternative view of history's climax than those of previous generations. The idea of progress that characterized Enlightenment thought led to the notion that "all history had been a progressive struggle toward this new, reason-based culture."¹⁶ This new narrative was at odds with the biblical storyline, which portrays all of history culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. In other words, "the Enlightenment was offering its own rival eschatology, a secular analogue to

¹⁴Ibid., 65.

¹⁵Ibid., 73.

¹⁶Ibid., 87.

the biblical picture of God's Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus."¹⁷ The newly adopted narrative of progress presented deep and serious challenges to the concept of biblical authority.¹⁸

The Bible's narrational function of authority was gradually lost through history, according to Wright. In his historiography of biblical authority, Wright attempts to demonstrate that for centuries Christians have misunderstood the concept of biblical authority. The church has exchanged the narrational concept of biblical authority for a stunted and underdeveloped doctrine of scriptural authority that emphasizes information over transformation. When the Bible began to be treated primarily as a source for dogma and theological information, rather than a tool through which God is dynamically bringing about his Kingdom, the church lost the most fundamental aspect of biblical authority.

What Is Biblical Authority?

In light of the theological and historical problems that plague the church's conception of biblical authority, Wright attempts to urge the church to renew and refresh its understanding of scriptural authority. There are several important points to consider. Wright maintains that what is needed is an *integrated* view of biblical authority that takes into consideration various complex issues, a view with several important aspects.¹⁹ An integrated view (1) highlights the role of the Spirit as the powerful, transformative agent; (2) keeps as its central focus the inaugurated kingdom and (3) "must envisage the church as characterized, at the very heart of its life, by prayerful listening to, strenuous wrestling

¹⁷Ibid., 88.

¹⁸Reason was the rival authority to revelation in the Enlightenment, according to Wright. He argues, "The Enlightenment insisted on 'reason' as the central capacity of human beings, enabling us to think and act correctly; it therefore regarded human beings as by nature rational and good. Reason was to be the arbiter of which religious and theological claims could be sustained." Ibid., 84.

¹⁹Ibid., 115.

with, humble obedience before, and powerful proclamation of Scripture, particularly in the ministries of its authorized leaders.”²⁰ Scripture is authoritative when it offers a narrative of God’s sovereign and saving plan for the entire cosmos, dramatically inaugurated by Jesus himself, announced and implemented through the Spirit-led life of the church precisely as the Scripture-reading community.²¹ For Wright,

this means that the authority of Scripture is most truly put into operation as the church goes to work in the world on behalf of the Gospel, the good news that in Jesus Christ the living God has defeated the powers of evil and begun the work of new creation. It is with the Bible in its hand, its head, and its heart — not merely with the newspaper in the latest political fashion or scheme — that the church can go to work in the world, confident that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not.²²

Any confession of biblical authority must take into consideration the church’s God-given mission in the world. Biblical authority is destined to function through human beings, through the church, through people who, living by the Spirit, have their lives molded by the delegated authority of the Spirit-inspired book.

In summary, Wright believes that the Bible has a delegated and narrational authority, through which God mediates his authoritative purposes. He believes that his formulation of biblical authority properly understands the categories that the Bible itself presents and that typical evangelical accounts of biblical authority must reconsider how the Bible speaks about authority. For Wright, typical evangelical accounts of biblical authority have simply misplaced the locus of biblical authority by applying the world’s models of authority to the Bible. Wright contends that a high view of Scripture necessitates letting Scripture be itself, an authoritative story.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 116. Wright further comments, “We read Scripture in order to be refreshed in our memory and understanding of the story within which we ourselves are actors, to be reminded where it has come from and where it is going to, and hence what our own part with it ought to be.” Ibid.

²²Ibid.

Stanley Grenz

Stanley Grenz thoroughly addresses the doctrine of biblical authority in his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*. In this account, Grenz does not address bibliology as its own doctrine; rather, he includes bibliology in his doctrine of the Spirit. Grenz believes that any dogmatic account of the Bible should fall within the doctrinal category of pneumatology, which is precisely why he addresses biblical authority only after considering the relationship between the Spirit and the Scripture.

In terms of the relationship between the Spirit and the Bible, Grenz believes that (1) the Spirit is the foundation of Scripture, (2) the task of the Spirit is to speak through Scripture, (3) the Bible is, in a unique sense, God's revelation, and (4) the Bible is used by the Spirit as an instrument of authoritative self-disclosure. These premises guide Grenz's thinking on biblical authority.

Grenz argues that the Spirit is the foundation of Scripture. The Spirit's primary mission is, "to complete the program of the triune God in the world."²³ For Grenz, the Bible is the Spirit's book. According to Grenz, "Because the Bible is the Spirit's book, its purpose is instrumental to his mission. For this reason, we construct our doctrine of the Bible within the context of pneumatology, treating the Spirit's activity in Scripture as one dimension of his overall mission."²⁴ Therefore, the Spirit is the foundation of Scripture in Grenz's formulation.

As Christians acknowledge the Bible as God's Word, they are actually acknowledging the work of the Spirit. Grenz argues, "In acknowledging the Bible, we are actually looking to the Holy Spirit who addresses us through its pages."²⁵ Furthermore, Grenz claims, "Scripture is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit

²³Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 379.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 380.

chooses to speak.”²⁶ Therefore, there is an inseparable relationship between the work of the Spirit and Scripture.

Grenz wants to distinguish between the two aspects of the Spirit’s work in Scripture, namely, inspiration and illumination.²⁷ He defines inspiration as, “The work of the Holy Spirit in influencing the authors and compilers of Scripture to produce writings which adequately reflect what God desired to communicate to us.”²⁸ Commenting on the various means that God uses to inspire Scripture, Grenz claims, “by direct command, a sense of urgency, or simply a personal desire or compulsion, God’s Spirit moved spiritual persons within the faith community to write or compile from dictation, experience, tradition, or wisdom those documents which reflect what God desired to have recorded in order that his processes might be served.”²⁹ Therefore, according to Grenz, God uses a multiplicity of means to communicate adequately with this creation.

However, the Spirit’s work in Scripture is not merely relegated to past inspiration. Rather, according to Grenz, “Throughout history he continues to act, speaking to people through the Bible.”³⁰ Grenz attributes the work of the Spirit in illumination to the mission of the Spirit. In illumination, the Spirit “makes the Bible come alive as he causes the people of God to understand the significance of the biblical texts for life in the present.” In the work of illumination the Spirit helps people become better readers of Scripture as he helps them to understand and apply Scripture to our present situation:

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 380–81. Grenz argues, “Because the canon closed, we differentiate between the Spirit’s completed activity as the agent in the original composition of the biblical documents (inspiration) and his ongoing action in bringing people to understand the truth in those documents (illumination).”

²⁸Ibid., 382.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Scripture mediates to each generation a set of categories that define and facilitate entrance into the faith community. The Bible narrates the story of God's work in the world, which begins at creation and climaxes in the future eschaton. The central purpose of this story is to be the Spirit's instrumentality in bringing sinful humans to change direction. This change occurs as they reinterpret their own life narratives in terms of the categories of that story and link their personal stories with the story of God through connection with the story of the people of God.

Therefore, Scripture functions authoritatively because in it the Spirit provides an interpretive framework for God's people — connecting all of God's people to God's story. Grenz continues,

The Spirit speaking through the Bible orients our present both on the basis of the past and in accordance with a vision for the future. . . . But the goal of the narrative does not lie completely in recounting the story. Rather, through the retelling of the narrative, the Spirit re-creates the past within the present life of the community. In so doing the texts provide paradigms and categories — an interpretive framework — by means of which the community under the direction of the Spirit can come to understand and respond to the challenges of life in the present.³¹

Accordingly, the Bible functions to constitute the church as people who are rightly oriented to the past as well as properly directed into the future.

Discussing the relationship between Scripture and revelation, Grenz notes, "The people of God have always confessed that the Bible itself is somehow connected with revelation and consequently in some sense is the actual Word of God."³² However, Grenz is uncomfortable simply equating the revelation of God with the Bible. Building upon his previously stated concept, that Scripture is ultimately a function of the Spirit, Grenz suggests that it is the Spirit who functions as the link between God's self-disclosure and the Bible. He argues, "The Spirit's essential role in the formation of Scripture and in the application of the biblical message in the life of the faith community suggests that pneumatology is the bridge between revelation and the Bible as the instrument in our coming to know God."³³ Scripture is sourced, and finds its abiding

³¹Ibid., 390.

³²Ibid., 392.

³³Ibid.

importance, in the activity of the one who breathes it, that is, who breathes life into the community through the message in its pages.

Grenz points out that the relationship between revelation and Scripture is complex. He notes that Christians acknowledge that the human words of the Bible are, somehow, God's Word to us. However, as noted earlier, he claims that we cannot simply equate the revelation of God with the Bible, a claim that he believes stems from the Bible itself. He remarks, "The New Testament authors preclude us from making a one-to-one correspondence between the words of Scripture and the Word of God."³⁴ For Grenz, the Word of God actually precedes Scripture, because the divine initiation of communication from God to humankind occurred before the inscripturaion process. Furthermore, revelation carries logical priority; Scripture, therefore, presupposes the reality of revelation.

Despite the logical priority of revelation before inscripturation, revelation and Scripture are necessarily interrelated. Grenz argues, "In part God's revelatory work came in through the formation of Scripture. . . God's revelatory work included the community's attempt to determine the implication of the divine self-disclosure for life."³⁵ Indeed, the biblical documents reflect the process by which the people of God, under the guidance of the Spirit, came to discover the practical implication of the divine holiness for their own vocation and God's covenant partners.

Grenz, having described the complicated relationship between revelation and Scripture, provides three categories for understanding the Bible as revelation. First, and primarily, he understands the Bible to be *derivative* revelation. "It is the witness to the

³⁴Ibid., 395. Grenz maintains that the phrase "word of God" is very often used in a complicated fashion. For example, he argues, "The biblical writers never use the phrase 'Word of God' to refer to the Jewish Scriptures, rather, they reserve this terminology for messages actually spoken by God to, or through, prophets." Ibid., 396.

³⁵Ibid.

historical self-disclosure of God and the record of that revelation. It testifies that God has indeed revealed himself.”³⁶ Therefore, Grenz understands the Bible to be a written testimony to, and interpretation of, God’s previous self-disclosure. It is, thus, derivative revelation because it is evidence of God’s revelation in history.

Second, Grenz understands the Bible to be *functional* revelation. “Scripture points beyond itself, directing the reader’s attention to the revealed God and informing the reader as to how God can be known.”³⁷ Thus, “The message of the Bible is the Spirit’s instrumentality in authoring in us salvation and sanctification. As the Spirit illumines our hearts to understand and respond to the scriptural texts which he brought into existence, these human words — which always remain objectively the word of God — become the word of God in our subjective experience.” Grenz believes that speaking of the Bible as functional revelation will prevent Christians from idolizing the Bible as an end in itself, and the Bible will be rightly understood as a Spirit-inspired and Spirit-illuminated means to knowing God.

Third, Grenz maintains that the Bible is *mediated* revelation. The Bible “mediates to us the proper understanding of God’s essence. It is God’s word to us insofar as it is the word about God.”³⁸ The Bible is an intermediary between the Creator and the creation which has the ultimate purpose of making the triune God known. Grenz notes, “There is no other source to which we can turn in order to read about the character of God.”³⁹ In this sense, the Bible is mediated revelation.

Finally, Grenz presents a unique understanding of biblical authority in light of the Spirit’s mission. Because the Bible is the book of the Spirit, it is through the Bible

³⁶Ibid., 396.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., 397.

³⁹Ibid.

that the Spirit speaks to us, and it is for this reason that Christians honor the Bible as their authority.⁴⁰ In addressing biblical authority, Grenz argues that the basis for biblical authority is its trustworthiness and that the Bible's authority extends to all of life.

Grenz roots biblical authority in the Spirit's inspiration of Scripture. He defines plenary inspiration as "the Holy Spirit's activity in superintending the writing of Scripture as it extends to the entire Bible. All that is found within the canon is Scripture, the product of the oversight of the Holy Spirit."⁴¹ He recognizes that verbal inspiration is more difficult to define. He argues that verbal inspiration, "declares that the activity of the Holy Spirit extends to the very words of Scripture."⁴² Grenz further notes that the danger with verbal inspiration is that it may be construed to indicate that God dictates Scripture, thereby denying any human authorship of Scripture. Therefore, verbal plenary inspiration, according to Grenz, extends to the entire canon and indicates that the Spirit is involved in the administration of employing human authors and human language to convey an intended message. The nature of the Bible, as Spirit-inspired, indicates that it is authoritative.

Biblical authority also relates directly to Scripture's instrumentality as the Spirit uses Scripture to accomplish God's purposes. Grenz argues that to conceive properly of biblical authority, one must understand that the Bible's trustworthiness is derived from the Spirit who infallibly speaks through it. Grenz maintains, "In declaring the trustworthiness of the Bible, therefore, we must keep in mind that it is ultimately not the book itself which we are affirming. Rather, we are confessing our faith in the Spirit who speaks his revelatory message to us through the pages of Scripture. In declaring its infallibility and inerrancy we are actually affirming the trustworthiness of the Spirit

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 398.

⁴²Ibid.

whose vehicle the Bible is.” So, to speak of biblical authority, for Grenz, is not to speak of a formal principle of the text, but to speak of the work of the Spirit.

Therefore, Scripture is trustworthy and authoritative because it is the instrument of the Spirit. Thus, due to the Spirit’s agency, Grenz affirms that the Bible is, as the book of the Spirit, our sole authority in all of life.

Grenz’s entire formulation of biblical authority is centered on his pneumatological approach. His understanding of the work of the Spirit in the text of Scripture guides him to argue for the Bible as an instrument of the Spirit, leading to a new approach to biblical authority. For Grenz, the Bible is authoritative because it is the Spirit’s book and because what we affirm about the Bible, we actually affirm about the Spirit. However, is that the proper approach to bibliology? Does the Bible present itself in the categories that Grenz expresses? In his attempt to appropriate pneumatology and the doctrine of God to a theology of revelation, does Grenz lose the Protestant doctrine of biblical authority? A full critique of Wright’s and Grenz’s doctrines of biblical authority will be provided at the end of this chapter. Beforehand, it is appropriate to consider dogmatically and biblically the work of the Spirit and how those conclusions might assist in developing a doctrine of biblical authority.

The Procession of the Spirit and Triune Communicative Activity

In previous chapters, specific attention to the authorial agency of the Father and Son was given. The Father’s authorial agency was considered in light of his unbegottenness and paternity. Similarly, the Son’s authorial agency was considered as it relates to his eternal begottenness, specifically his sonship and incarnation. Finally, this chapter will consider the authorial agency of the Spirit. The specific personal relation that will be considered is the Spirit’s procession. The theological category of procession relates specifically to the Spirit’s relational mode of subsistence. Considering the Spirit’s

procession will advance this argument by providing insight into how the Spirit functions as the authorial agent through which the Father and Son accomplish their communicative and revelatory purposes. Four considerations related to the Spirit and his mode of subsistence must be considered: (1) The deity of the person of Spirit, (2) the procession of the Spirit, (3) his procession from the Father, (4) and his procession from the Son.

The Bible affirms that the Holy Spirit is, himself, God. Scripture ascribes to the Spirit attributes and activities that are distinctly divine. To him is attributed the name of God (Acts 5:3-4) he is eternal (Gen 1:2), omnipresent (Ps 139:70), omniscient (1 Cor 2:10), and omnipotent (Ps 33:6). The Spirit sovereignly distributes the gifts of God (1 Cor 12). The Spirit is all of these things in the same way as the Father and Son, but he is distinguished from them by being the third person and by having a distinct mode of subsistence. Feinberg notes,

As to the Holy Spirit, if he is not fully God, the implications for salvation are again serious. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit regenerates believers and indwells and fills them, but if the Holy Spirit is a lesser God or no God at all, how can we be sure that he can do any of these things? Moreover, unless he is coequal in being and purpose with the Father and the Son, what guarantees that even if he tried to do such things, the Father and the Son would recognize his actions as appropriate and relate to us accordingly?⁴³

Therefore, The Spirit possesses the same essence as the Father and Son and is, along with the Father and Son, to be worshipped and glorified.

The early church attempted to explain that the Spirit is God and is neither the Father nor the Son, but is himself a distinct person. The Council of Nicaea in 325 did not develop the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with the same depth the way later creeds would, but simply stated, “And (we believe) in the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ Eventually, the Nicene-

⁴³ John S Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 440.

⁴⁴ John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine From the Bible to the Present* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 31. For more on the history and development of the confessions of trinitarian faith, see Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 51–82; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the*

Constantinopolitan Creed gave further doctrinal clarity on a trinitarian confession of pneumatology. Concerning the Spirit, the church at Constantinople confessed, “And (we believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and Son, who spoke through the prophets.”⁴⁵ The phrase about the Spirit’s procession from the Father and Son distinguishes the Spirit from the Father and Son, yet, the following phrase indicates that the Spirit, along with the Father and Son, is worthy of honor and worship.⁴⁶ To confess that the Spirit is worthy of worship and honor in the same way that the Father and Son are worshipped and honored is to recognize the Spirit as a divine person. The divine person of the Spirit “performs acts that only persons perform: comforting, revealing, inspiring, speaking, witnessing, hearing, knowing, teaching, guiding, striving, and interceding,” notes Frame.⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit procures life and pours out charity because he his love in person (Gal 5:22-24).⁴⁸ The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son eternally as love in person, the fruit and seal of the Father’s infinite donation of himself to the Son, infinitely returned by the Son (2 Tim 1:7).

In acknowledging the divinity and person of the Spirit one must distinguish how the person of the Spirit is different from God the Father and God the Son. The divine person of the Spirit does not differ from the Father and Son in relation to essence (this

Development of Doctrine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

⁴⁵Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 33.

⁴⁶Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011).

⁴⁷John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 1, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 691.

⁴⁸Emery, *The Trinity*, 158.

they share in common), but in orientation to personhood. In reference to the Father and Son, and specifically their relations of subsistence, Christian theology speaks of the Father's unbegottenness and the Son's filiation. In relation to the mode of subsistence of the Spirit Christian theology speaks of his procession. Thus, the Spirit is the divine person who subsists (*relatio personalis*) as the one who proceeds. The Spirit, being God in himself, is of the same essence as the Father and Son, but is himself relationally distinct. The Spirit is a distinct person because the Spirit eternally subsists as the one who proceeds.⁴⁹ The term "procession," or "spiration," is used to communicate the personal relation of the Holy Spirit and designates his eternal coming forth. Like *filiatio*, it must be conceived as the eternal communication of the same divine essence.⁵⁰ Specifically, the Spirit's procession is defined as the inward act in which the Father and Son simultaneously and eternally produce the Spirit from their own substance, and entirely within the one divine essence.⁵¹

Principally, the Spirit's procession is from the Father. The earliest trinitarian writings indicate an awareness of the monarchy of the Father.⁵² The Father is the *fons divinitatis* of the Godhead. In confessing the procession of the Spirit, it is important to note the mode of subsistence of the Father as *paternitas*. Addressing the Spirit's

⁴⁹The term "procession" speaks of the personal property and relation of the Spirit to the Father and Son. Richard A Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 247. For further definition on the procession of the Spirit, see J. G. G. Norman, "Procession of the Spirit," In, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

⁵⁰Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 313. There has been a great deal of conversation about the distinction between generation and procession, but they are difficult to distinguish. One difference is that the Son is begotten from the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

⁵¹ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 286.

⁵²Particularly important in this regard were the anit-Eunomian writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, the Council of Constantinople's creedal affirmation that the Spirit proceeded from the Father, and the anit-Sabellian polemic, which clarified the Father's role as the one cause within the Godhead. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 432.

procession principally from the Father, Augustine notes, “The Father alone is called unbegotten. . . . The Son is born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father principally, the Father giving the procession without any interval of time.”⁵³

Because the Father is the *fons*, the Spirit proceeds principally from him.

While the Spirit proceeds from the Father, he also proceeds from the Son.⁵⁴ The term *filioque* (literally, “and from the Son”) is the dogmatic formula expressing the double procession of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ The term *filioque* was later added by the Western Church to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed immediately after the words “the Holy Spirit . . . who proceeds from the Father.” It was not a part of the original creed, and it first appeared in creedal formula at the Third Council of Toledo in 589. Although there was some controversy at the time of introduction, it was not until 1017 when the term received official sanction in Rome by Benedict VIII, which was followed by the East-West schism in 1054. In addressing the procession of the Spirit from the Son, it is important to note the mode of subsistence of the Son as *filiatio*.⁵⁶ To confess that the Spirit proceeds principally from the Father is to also confess that the Spirit’s procession is from the Son. Augustine contends that

there must be a reason why in this Trinity the Son and no one else is called the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit and no one else is called the Gift of God, and that God the Father is the only one from whom the Word is born and from whom the Holy Spirit principally proceeds. Therefore . . . we find that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son also. Therefore the Father begat the Son in such a way that the

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴See F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. “Filioque”; Norman, “Procession of the Spirit,” 805; A Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church: From Apostolic Times Until the Council of Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Emery, 134–58.

⁵⁵For a helpful, article length, overview of the history and theology of the *filioque*, see Gerald Bray, “The Filioque Clause in History and Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 91–144.

⁵⁶Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 260–64.

common Gift should proceed from him also and so that the Holy Spirit should be the Spirit of both.⁵⁷

Therefore, the relationship that eternally exists between the Father and Son informs a Christian understanding of the Spirit's procession. The Son mediates all that proceeds from the Father, thus, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son. Augustine later argues,

And anyone who can understand that when the Son said, As the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son to have life in himself (Jn 5:26), he did not mean that the Father gave life to the Son already existing without life, but that he begot him timelessly in such a way that the life which the Father gave the Son by begetting him is co-eternal with the life of the Father who gave it, should also understand that just as the Father has it in himself that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him, so he gave to the Son that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him too, and in both cases timelessly; and this that to say that the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Son is something which the Son has from the Father that the Holy Spirit should proceed from him. But one must not think of any time in this matter, which would include before and after, because there is absolutely no such thing as time there at all.⁵⁸

In this section Augustine continues to emphasize the importance of viewing the Father as the cause and source of the communion but argues that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son. In this way, the Father and the Son are one single *principium* of the Spirit.⁵⁹ Therefore, the procession of the Spirit comes principally from the Father and the Son. Francis Turretin argues, "Thus, whatever the Spirit has, he has from the Son no less than from the Father, and as the Son is said to be from the Father because he does not speak of himself, but of the Father, so the Spirit ought to be said to be and to proceed from the Son because he hears and speaks from him."⁶⁰

Although the Spirit proceeds from the Father, it is not denied of the Son because the mission of the Spirit is ascribed to the Son; moreover whatever the Father

⁵⁷Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.26.47.

⁵⁸Idib.

⁵⁹Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:316.

⁶⁰Francis Turretin, *Volume 2: Eleventh Through Seventeenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr, trans. Musgrave George Giger, Institutes of Elenctic Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1993), 310.

has, the Son is said to have equally. It is the one operation of the Father and Son to breathe the Holy Spirit. In this way, all three divine persons of the Trinity maintain their distinctive modes of subsistence while sharing in the one divine essence.

To be clear, there is no suggestion of subordinationism in God, for whatever the Father is, this the Son is, and the Spirit is, in the Godhead.⁶¹ The Spirit, “proceeds from the Father and the Son by one and the same breathing and in equal measure from both.”⁶² The Spirit does not receive deity from the Father and Son in his procession, as the Son does not receive deity in his *filiatio*. Rather, the Holy Spirit dwells in and flows from the inner being and life of the Trinity, where he shares in the reciprocal knowing and communing of the Father and Son and differs only in his mode of subsistence.

In affirming that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, one confesses the unity of the Father and Son as the principle of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in affirming that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, one also emphasizes the personal distinction of the Father and the Son.⁶³

Understanding the Spirit’s mode of subsistence as the one who proceeds from the Father and the Son is instructive for formulating a doctrine biblical authority, specifically as it relates to the Spirit’s authoritative communicative agency. The Spirit’s authorial capacity and activity comes from his mode of subsistence. Therefore, an account of biblical authority, as it relates to the Spirit, must take into consideration the Spirit’s authorial activity as the one who proceeds from the Father and Son. The Spirit’s authorial agency, in accordance with his mode of subsistence, speaks the authoritative Word that he has received from the Father and Son.

⁶¹Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 222.

⁶²Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2008), 131.

⁶³Emery, *The Trinity* 146.

The Authority of the Spirit

Earlier chapters examined how the Bible appropriates authority specifically to the Father and the Son. This chapter considers the biblical testimony itself as it relates to the authoritative work of the Spirit. The Bible uses specific and careful language to describe the authoritative communicative activity of the Spirit.

As noted earlier, the Christian canon begins by describing God's creative activity as being mediated by his speech. However, before God's creative activity begins, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen 1:2), which leads to the description of God speaking the created order into existence through the Word. The Spirit's presence is an early canonical indication of trinitarian operations. In the Gospel of John, Jesus assures his disciples that it is better for him to leave because in his absence, the Spirit will come: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7-8). Therefore, not only is the mediatorial activity of the Word an essential theme of Christian theology, but the authoritative and efficacious work of the Spirit is as well. Thus, all that God does is initiated by the Father, mediated through the Son, and completed by the Spirit, including the authoring of Scripture. Scripture then, must originate with the authorial agency of the Father, be mediated through the activity of the Son, and be fulfilled by the authoritative work of the Spirit. Therefore, it is worth considering how the Scripture presents the Spirit's authorial agency.

While many texts could be examined, specific attention will be devoted to John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Timothy 3:16; and 2 Pet 1:16-21.⁶⁴ An examination of these passages will establish biblical categories and language for grasping the nature and effects of the Spirit's authorial agency.

⁶⁴The purpose of examining these texts is not to provide complete exegesis of each text, but rather to examine the nature of Spirit's authoritative work in the context of trinitarian communicative activity. Furthermore, these texts are not exhaustive, but representative of how the Bible presents the

John 14:26

Some of the most sustained teaching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit to be found in the Gospels is from Jesus himself. In John 14, as Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure, he provides comfort by promising the gift of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-17 Jesus says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” In this chapter, as Jesus is heading to the agony of the cross, he provides spiritual support to his troubled disciples. The gift that Jesus promises his followers is unprecedented, the παράκλητος.⁶⁵

Of significant importance for this project are Jesus’ words concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit that occur in John 14:26. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” The words of Jesus in this passage give insight into the work and the authorial communicative agency of the Holy Spirit.

It is essential to point out the trinitarian operations implicit within Jesus’ words. The role of the Spirit in this context is not to be a replacement for Jesus, but a helper who magnifies the work of Christ.⁶⁶ Referring to the Holy Spirit, Jesus explains that he is sent principally by the Father, but in the name of Jesus (ὁ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου). Köstenberger points out, “The sending terminology applied to the authoritative communicative activity of the Spirit.

⁶⁵The Greek term παράκλητος, rendered “Helper,” means “one called alongside, to encourage, and to exhort.” In secular Greek the term is primarily used to refer to a legal assistant or an advocate, according to D. A. Carson, in *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 501. See J. Behm, “Parakletos,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 800–14; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit - In Biblical Teaching, Through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 140–44.

⁶⁶Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Scripture (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2002), 132.

Spirit integrates him into a network of sending relationships established in John's Gospel."⁶⁷ The Father only sends and is never sent. The Son is sent by the Father, and along with the Father sends the Spirit. The Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son.

Though the term παράκλητος is principally used to describe the ministry of the Spirit, several verses earlier, in John 14:16, Jesus implies that this term can also be used to describe his ministry. He says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper (ἄλλον παράκλητον), to be with you forever," which implies that Jesus himself is a helper (παράκλητος) for his disciples.⁶⁸ Another (ἄλλον) παράκλητος in the context of John's Gospel indicates, especially in the context of Jesus' departure, that the disciples currently have one, Jesus himself, who is departing.⁶⁹ Further, in 1 John 2:1 Jesus is called the advocate (παράκλητος) before the Father of believers who have sinned. The use of the term, then, indicates the unity of the missions of the Son and the Spirit. Hence, the Spirit's mission a continuation of Jesus' mission because the Spirit acts as the Son's emissary. The ministry of the Spirit is to continue to revelatory work of the Son that the Son receives from the Father.

The Spirit serves as Helper in two ways in this text. First, the Spirit serves as one who teaches (διδάξει).⁷⁰ Jesus describes the work of the Spirit as the one who will "teach you all things." In this sense, a primary task of the Holy Spirit is to be continually referring to the Word and work of Christ as he instructs Jesus' disciples. Therefore, the Spirit is a teacher and a tutor. So far in the Gospels Jesus has been seen as the

⁶⁷Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 442.

⁶⁸J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 783.

⁶⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 500.

⁷⁰This word is used elsewhere to describe instructions that the disciples were given (Matt 28:15) and to describe formal instruction (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:21; John 7:14; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Tim 4:11). Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 241.

paradigmatic teacher, but Jesus indicates that his Spirit will continue to aid his followers in divine teaching. Carson further notes that as Helper, “The Spirit’s ministry in this respect is not to bring qualitatively new revelation, but to complete, to fill out, the revelation brought by Jesus himself.”⁷¹ Calvin says, the Spirit “will not be a builder of new revelations.”⁷² The authorial activity of the Spirit, then, is to teach the Word of Christ.

Second, the Spirit serves as the one who reminds (ὑπομνήσει) the disciples of all that Jesus has said.⁷³ One of the principal tasks of the Helper, after Jesus’ glorification, is to remind the disciples of Jesus’ teaching in the new situation in redemptive history after the resurrection, and to help them grasp its significance and thus to teach them what it meant.⁷⁴ Jesus’ words cannot be overlooked at this point. He makes clear that the speaking ministry of the Spirit is directly connected to the speaking ministry of the Son. Furthermore, the theme of remembrance in John’s Gospel, as well as in biblical theology, should not be overlooked. In John’s Gospel Jesus is seen several times exhorting his disciples to remember his words, saying, “Remember what I told you” (John 15:20; 16:4). Jesus’ terminology of remembrance is significant from a biblical theology standpoint. In redemptive history, God reveals himself as the one who continually remembers his people. God remembers his covenant and his people (Gen 9:15; Exod 32:13; Lev 26:42, 45; Ezek 16:60). Throughout Scripture, God’s people are called to God and his covenantal promises. They are called to remember their Lord, his commands, the covenant, his great mercy, and his mighty deeds (Exod 13:3; 20:8, Num 15:40; Deut

⁷¹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 505.

⁷²John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 101.

⁷³In this instance, the verb ὑπομνήσει appears as a third person, future, active indicative, meaning that in future occasions the Spirit will act upon the disciples to help them remember the Word of Christ. While Jesus’ words certainly have a special implication for the disciples present with Christ, his words are applicable to all whom the Spirit instructs with the Word of Christ.

⁷⁴Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 505.

8:18; Pss 77:11; 105:5, Eccl 12:1). However, God's people have demonstrated themselves to be forgetful of the Lord and his ways (Ps 106:7). The significance here is that Jesus promises his disciples a Helper who will guide them into remembrance of the Lord's Word and his mighty deeds. This promise, though certainly true for the disciples, is also true for all of Jesus' followers. In his grace, by the sending of the Spirit, he supplies what he requires: remembrance. The Spirit accomplishes the task of teaching, instructing, and reminding through the Word of God.

The Spirit, as the one who proceeds from the Father and Son, has the communicative task of teaching and reminding Jesus' followers of all that Jesus had said and done. The revelatory task of the Spirit is, therefore, Christocentric.⁷⁵ The Spirit does not function as an independent or autonomous witness.⁷⁶ Just as Jesus insisted that his teaching was not his own, but represented the teaching of the Father, so it is here asserted that the Spirit would interpret the teaching of Jesus.⁷⁷ The Spirit, according to Beasley-Murray, "teaches the disciples to grasp the revelation of God brought by Jesus in richness and profundity."⁷⁸ Today, the principal way the Spirit accomplishes this authorial task is in and through the authoritative biblical text, which is the Word of the Father, spoken through the Son, and taught by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit cannot speak a new revelatory Word, but only the Word that he receives from the Father and Son, which, as has already been demonstrated, is Scripture. Thus, in Scripture the Spirit is continually teaching, instructing, and reminding disciples of Jesus through the Word.

⁷⁵Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 185.

⁷⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 526.

⁷⁷Borchert, *John 12-21*, 132.

⁷⁸George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 261.

John 15:26

Jesus, while delivering his Farewell Discourse, encourages his disciples with a new commandment: to love one another (John 15:9-17). In the midst of his discussion about the love of God and the love of one another he elaborates that his followers will be hated by the world. Due to their close identification with Jesus, his followers will be treated by the world in the same way that the world treated Jesus: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). However, in the midst of this persecution Jesus continues to teach his disciples about the ministry and work of the παράκλητος. By encouraging his disciples, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” Jesus’ words give further insight into trinitarian communicative agency and the Spirit’s authorial activity.

First, John indicates that the Son and the Father send the Spirit. In contrast to earlier pronouncements about the sending of the Spirit, which distinguish that Father as the one who sends the Spirit, this passage clarifies that the Father and Son both send the Spirit. For John, the ministry of the Father and Son are so closely tied that there is no discrepancy between the language that refers to the Father’s sending of the Spirit and language that refers to the Son’s sending of the Spirit.⁷⁹ The verb ἐκπορεύεται (proceeds) indicates that the Spirit comes forth from both the Father and the Son, and is different from the term that is generally applied to the Son’s going out (ἐξέρχομαι) (John 8:42, 13:3, 16:27, 28, 30; 17:8). It is this terminology that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed uses to distinguish the Spirit’s mode of subistence.⁸⁰ The Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, as demonstrated in this passage.

⁷⁹Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 528.

⁸⁰See Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 217–34.

Second, the authorial agency of the Son is to bear witness to the Son (μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ). There is undoubtedly a connection between John calling the Spirit the Spirit of truth and the content of the Spirit's testimony, the Son who is the Truth (John 14:6). John argues that the work of the Spirit is to continually refer to the Son. The witness of the Spirit, along with the disciples, is to bring to light the truth of the revelation of Jesus.⁸¹ The Holy Spirit as a witness is faithful and true because of his procession from the Father and Son and because of his testimony about truth.

This passage indicates that the Father, Son, and Spirit work in concert with one another. As it relates to the Father and Son, they both send the παράκλητος to the disciples. Further, the παράκλητος is characterized by truthful testimony because he is continually testifying of the Son.

John 16:12-15

Jesus continues his description about the ministry of the παράκλητος in chapter 16 of John's Gospel.⁸² In some sense, the fifth and final Paraclete passage is a suitable climax, because it focuses on the completion of the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁸³ In the passage, Jesus continues to provide hope and assurance for his disciples after his departure. He says,

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Jesus begins by stating that he is restraining himself by not saying all that he could say because the disciples cannot bear all his words now. Does Jesus' statement that

⁸¹Beasley-Murray, *John*, 277.

⁸²This is the fifth and final of the five Paraclete passages (14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11, 12–15).

⁸³Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 539.

his disciples cannot bear to hear all that he has to say, and that the Spirit will be the one to guide his followers into truth, contradict his previous statements about the ministry of the Spirit? While there are distinct communicative functions in both passages, there is also mutual complementarity.⁸⁴ Presumably, the reason they cannot bear all that Jesus has to say is because they do not yet have the Spirit. However, when the Spirit comes he will speak all that he hears. Therefore, Carson notes, “We are to understand that Jesus is the nodal point of revelation, God’s culminating self-disclosure, God’s final self-expression, God’s Word (John 1:14). All antecedent revelation has pointed toward him and reaches its climax in him.”⁸⁵ The Spirit, however, is continually pointing to Christ in the Father’s Word.

Jesus describes the Spirit of truth as one who guides (ὁδηγήσει) and speaks on the authority of the only one by whom he was sent.⁸⁶ Specifically, the Spirit will guide disciples of Jesus into the truth (ἀληθεία). The Helper guides the disciples into truth by leading them to Jesus because he, by his own declaration, is truth. Jesus declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus used the noun ἀληθεία to describe himself to his followers, but here, he is describing the Spirit as being characterized by truth, and he promises that as the Spirit of truth he will guide Jesus’ disciples into truth. Indeed, the role of the Spirit of truth is not independent from Jesus. The harmony of trinitarian operations is explicit in John’s Gospel.⁸⁷ The Spirit does not work apart from Jesus; he always witness to the truth in Jesus. Therefore, the Spirit does not have an independent ministry, but came to bring

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶The verb ὁδηγήσει can mean “to assist someone in reaching a destination, but in this instance, it has the force of communicating that the Spirit’s ministry is to guide for the purpose of helping the disciples acquire information and knowledge. Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 690.

⁸⁷Borchert, *John 12-21*, 169.

glory to Jesus and was sent by the Father in Jesus' name so that Jesus would be honored.⁸⁸

Further, similar terminology is used throughout the New Testament to describe the relationship between the Spirit and God's Word. Paul describes the Ephesians as those who have heard the word of the truth (ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας) and were sealed by the Spirit (Eph 1:13). The Colossians have heard the word of the truth (λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας), according to Paul (Col 1:5). Paul describes himself as having the truth of Christ in him (ἀλήθεια Χριστοῦ ἐν ἐμοί) (2 Cor 11:10). He also encourages Timothy to rightly handle the word of truth (ὀρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας) (2 Tim 2:15), and James argues that God accomplishes his purposes through the word of truth (λόγῳ ἀληθείας) (Jas 1:18). Thus, the New Testament itself bears witness to the fulfillment of the promise of Christ to his disciples, that through the Spirit and by the Word they will be led into all truth. The Spirit of truth leads Jesus' disciples into all of the implications of the truth, because all revelation is bound up around the one who is the truth (John 14:6). The declaration of truth characterizes the ministry of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

A theme of John's Gospel is that Jesus never speaks or acts on his own initiative (3:34; 5:19-20; 7:16-18; 8:26-29, 42-43; 12:47-50; 14:10), a topic thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, the Spirit only speaks what hears. The Spirit's communicative activity is set to the same pattern of the Son's. Jesus says of the Spirit's speech, "whatever he hears he will speak." Jesus says of his own speech, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (John 7:16) and also affirms "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me" (John 8:28). Both the Spirit and Son speak the words they receive, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God" (John 3:34). Therefore, the Spirit, as the one who proceeds, has heard and knows all of God's Word. The authorial agency of the Spirit is to communicate to Jesus'

⁸⁸Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 527.

disciples that which he has received.

Furthermore, in John 16:14-15, as Köstenberger points out, “the Father is identified as the ultimate source of both the Son’s and the Spirit’s revelatory ministry to believers.”⁸⁹ The Spirit’s actions in revelatory teaching are originated by the Father and mediated through the Son. Ambrose comments,

The Son of God says concerning the Holy Spirit that “he will not speak from himself,” that is, not without the participation of the Father and myself. For the Spirit is not divided and separated but speaks what he hears. . . . This means he shall not speak without me. For he speaks the truth, he breathes wisdom. He does not speak without the Father, for he is the Spirit of God. He does not hear from himself, for all things are of God. . . . Therefore, what the Spirit says is the Son’s, what the Son has given is the Father’s. So neither the Son nor the Spirit speaks anything of himself. For the Trinity speaks nothing external to itself.⁹⁰

Many have noted that this ensures the unity of God’s revelation. While this is true, it is better to say that Spirit’s revelatory actions that proceed from the Father and through the Son ensure the triunity of all of God’s revelation. Therefore, the significance of this passage is the acknowledgment that the Spirit participates in the task of trinitarian communicative activity by virtue of his relation to Father and Son, just as Jesus communicated it by virtue of his relation to the Father. The revelatory task of the Godhead is united in purpose and mission.

Furthermore, this passage demonstrates that the mission of the Spirit is never separated from Christ’s Word. Christ says that the Spirit will take what is his and declare it. Christ’s Word is never removed from the ministry of the Spirit. “For as soon as the Spirit is severed from Christ’s Word the door is open to all sorts of craziness and impostures,” notes Calvin.⁹¹ Moreover, the ministry of the Spirit is to continually speak

⁸⁹Köstenberger, *John*, 474.

⁹⁰Ambrose, “On the Holy Spirit,” in *Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 10, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 131.

⁹¹Calvin, *John*, 144.

Christ's Word, and in doing so he glorifies the Son. The ministry of the Helper is to teach, reveal, and interpret Jesus to the disciples.⁹²

In this passage, Jesus gives insight to his disciples that the persons of the Godhead collaborate in the task of divine self-disclosure.⁹³ Thus, the Spirit is a teacher, an instructor. He helps the disciples remember Christ's Word, he guides to truth, and he declares God's Word, and in doing so brings glory to the Son. His communicative activity, as the one who proceeds from the Father and Son, is not to speak on his own authority, or to present new revelation, but to speak whatever he hears from the Father and Son.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth of the simple and astounding message of the gospel: Christ crucified. In the first few verses of chapter 2 Paul argues, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom." Rather, Paul argues, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." He further argues that his speech and message, "were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." In these opening sentences of chapter 2, Paul is arguing against a Corinthian attitude of wisdom that sought to injure the gospel message.⁹⁴ In verses 1-6, Paul unequivocally rejects human wisdom, but insists that he

⁹²M. M. B. Turner, "Holy Spirit I: Gospels," ed. Daniel G. Reid, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament: A One Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 488.

⁹³Köstenberger, *John*, 474.

⁹⁴For a helpful treatment of the antithesis between God's wisdom and human wisdom, see Pheme Perkins, *First Corinthians*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 63–64.

does speak wisdom among the mature (τελείοις).⁹⁵ Indeed, he maintains that there is yet a spiritual wisdom that is not of this age but is imparted by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul provides insight into trinitarian communicative agency and the authorial work of the Spirit. He argues,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul’s main argument in this passage is that God’s wisdom is revealed by the Spirit. There are three major thrusts in Paul’s argumentation: (1) verses 6-10a set out a basic contrast between the nature of God’s wisdom and the wisdom sought by the Corinthians; (2) verses 10b-13 explain how the God’s mysterious wisdom becomes known to some and how others are excluded because those who have received the Spirit know the mind of God; and (3) verses 14-16 conclude Paul’s argument by reaffirming the categories of natural and spiritual people, those who have received God’s revelation by the Spirit and those who have not.

First, Paul maintains that that there is a difference between human and divine

⁹⁵David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 91. Paul uses this term later (1 Cor 14:20) to insist on maturity, but yet exhorts his readers to be infants in regard to evil (Ἀδελφοί, μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν, ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσίν τέλειοι γίνεσθε). See. Bauer and Danker, 996.

wisdom. Central to Paul's thinking is that the wisdom of God, Christ crucified and proclaimed (1 Cor 1:23-24, 30; 2:2) stands in basic contrast to the wisdom of this world. The wisdom of God is fundamentally different from the wisdom that was pursued in Corinth. God's wisdom is covert and mysterious, and it was decreed before the beginning of time. Paul is presently concerned with explaining that those who are in pursuit of merely human wisdom will never be able to recognize the wisdom of God. The message is hidden in a mystery because it can only be known through God's revelation.⁹⁶ This is an important point because, for Paul, wisdom can only be revealed by the Spirit; it is never merely available to human pursuit. Anthony Thiselton comments, "Human persons cannot search out the hidden things of God unaided, through their own limited resources of wisdom, knowledge, or stance."⁹⁷ Humans are completely unable to unravel the mystery of divine revelation for themselves; it can only be given by God.⁹⁸ For Paul then, the Spirit is intimately connected God's efficacious work of revelation.

The wisdom of which Paul is speaking is radically different from the wisdom known to the Corinthians. Although Paul is making a clear distinction between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the Corinthians, he does so by using wisdom language with which the Corinthians were very familiar. The language that Paul uses in this section is not common to Paul, but he is found using their language, filling it with his own content, and thus refuting them.⁹⁹ For example, the word wisdom (σοφία), as used here, can refer to worldly wisdom or the wisdom that God alone can impart.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Paul is

⁹⁶The use of the perfect participle "hidden" (ἀποκεκρυμμένην) expresses Paul's view that though it has been revealed to those who love God, it remains hidden to those who are perishing.

⁹⁷Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 256.

⁹⁸Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 96.

⁹⁹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 100.

¹⁰⁰Bauer and Danker, 934. See Psalm 97:2; Daniel 2:19; Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21; Philippians 3:15.

presenting a stark contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the Corinthians, but using their language categories in order to accomplish his theological purposes.

Paul asserts that God's wisdom can only be known by God's people, those who love him, because they alone have the Spirit, and this wisdom has been revealed (ἀπεκάλυψεν) by the Spirit. This verb means, "to cause something to be fully known, reveal, disclose, bring to light, and to make fully known."¹⁰¹ The reason Paul and other Christian teachers can declare God's wisdom is because that which was previously inaccessible through human will has been revealed to them by the Spirit.¹⁰² Therefore, Paul proves his point that no human intellect is capable of understanding the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is only received through divine revelation from the Spirit. The Spirit causes these things to be known to those who are spiritual. Paul's point is that the Spirit is the means of revelation a theme that Paul reiterates in verses 10b-13.

Second, in verses 10b-13, Paul explains why some people are exposed to the wisdom of God while others are not. The second portion of verse 10 marks the beginning of the main thrust of Paul's argument. The basis of the argument that follows is similar to the Greek principle, "like is known only by like," that is, humans do not on their own possess the qualities that would make it possible to know God or God's wisdom.¹⁰³ Karl Barth argues, "God is known by God alone."¹⁰⁴ This is because, according to Paul, the Spirit is God, knows God, and searches God. Therefore, only those who have the Spirit can know God. Gordon Fee suggests that Paul's words here perhaps contain a tinge of

¹⁰¹Ibid., 112.

¹⁰²Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 128.

¹⁰³Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 110.

¹⁰⁴Karl Barth, *The Revelation of God: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, Study Ed, vol. 1.2.4, Church Dogmatics (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 179.

irony. Fee argues that the Corinthians “considered Paul’s preaching to be ‘milk’: on the contrary, he implies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God’s own wisdom, which his Spirit gives to those who love him.”¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, only God can know God; yet, beyond this truth, those to whom the Holy Spirit reveals God also know God. Morris notes, “Because the Spirit who reveals is truly God, what he reveals is the truth of God.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, in Paul’s argumentation, the Spirit of God becomes the link between God and humanity, between wisdom and futility.

Paul continues his argument for the Spirit as revealer by presenting a human analogy in verse 11. Who can know a person, except for the spirit of the person himself?¹⁰⁷ The answer to Paul’s rhetorical question is: no one. Who can comprehend the wisdom of God except the Spirit of God? No one. “Nobody outside God can know what takes place within God, nobody but the Spirit of God. The Spirit knows God from the inside,” reasons Morris.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, only God can know God, only the Spirit can reveal God, and only those who possess the Spirit can rightly receive divine revelation.

In verse 12 Paul returns to his main line of argumentation, which presents a contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Worldly wisdom, Corinthian wisdom, was seen as costly and valuable, whereas Paul contrasts it with God’s wisdom, something that is freely and graciously given. Calvin notes that God’s wisdom, in contrast to the wisdom the Corinthians pursued, is, “not acquired in a natural way, and is not attained by mental capacity, but depends entirely on the revelation of the Spirit,”

¹⁰⁵Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 111.

¹⁰⁶Leon L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 57.

¹⁰⁷It is important to note here that Paul is not making anthropological claims, nor is he suggesting an analogy between the Trinity and human personality. Paul is simply using a human analogy to describe the truth that God’s Spirit, being God himself, knows God and becomes our link for knowing God also.

¹⁰⁸Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 57.

something that is freely given.¹⁰⁹ Paul's point is that the revelation that he has received is meritless, but has been freely bestowed by the Spirit. The Spirit freely reveals the Triune God.

Having argued for the common gift of the Spirit as that which enables one to understand God's wisdom, Paul refers to the content of his gospel message of wisdom. The message of the gospel is spoken through the ministry of the apostles as they speak words of wisdom. This phrase refers back to verse 9, the things revealed by the Spirit. As such, the apostle's teaching proceeds from the Spirit, rather than human wisdom.¹¹⁰ The wisdom of God is imparted through words, specifically words from the Spirit. Paul is arguing that his very message is the wisdom of God. Therefore, God's wisdom is a worded wisdom and can be principally understood as Scripture itself.¹¹¹ The ministry of the Spirit is therefore interwoven with the ministry of the Word.

The third major thrust of Paul's argument is contained in verses 14-16. In this section, Paul reaffirms his distinction between natural and spiritual people. Paul describes the natural person (ψυχικὸς) three ways.¹¹² First, the natural person does not accept things that come from the Spirit. The verb, to accept (δέχεται), is usually used for receiving another person (Matt 10:14, 40; Luke 9:5; John 4:45; Col 4:10; Heb 11:31), but can also be used to indicate approval by being receptive (Matt 11:14; 2 Cor 8:17; 2 Thess

¹⁰⁹John Calvin, *On the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1:113.

¹¹⁰Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Scripture (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2014), 93.

¹¹¹Finding a proper meaning for the verb "to interpret," (συγκρίνοντες) has been very difficult for many interpreters. There does not seem to be a consensus on exactly what Paul might be referring to. Part of the problem is that Paul only uses this verb twice elsewhere, both times in 2 Cor 10:12, where it clearly means "compare," a meaning that, for many, does not seem appropriate here. Most likely Paul is intending to simply say, "explaining the things of the Spirit by means of the words taught by the Spirit." Given our context in the history of salvation, it is certainly plausible to argue that the words of the Spirit include Scripture. For further analysis, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 266.

¹¹²Bauer and Danker, 1100. What is natural pertains to the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in contrast to the realm of experience whose central characteristic is πνεῦμα.

2:10). The implication is not that natural people are simply incapable of understanding spiritual things, but that, being natural people, they reject spiritual things.¹¹³

Second, the natural person is unable to understand the wisdom of God because it is foolish (μωρία) to him. Paul is emphasizing his theme from the previous chapter that the proclamation of Christ crucified, God's wisdom, is rejected by those who are perishing (1:18, 23). To all those who are lost, the news of the gospel, the Christian preaching of the Messiah was considered μωρία. Paul also uses the same term in the following chapter to argue that "the wisdom of this world is folly (μωρία) with God" (1 Cor 3:19). The natural person rejects the things of the Spirit because they appear to be irrational and thoughtless, the very things the Corinthians were trying to avoid in their pursuit of wisdom.

Third, the natural person cannot understand spiritual things because, by nature, he is not a spiritual person. To anticipate the next point, a spiritual person is one who has the Spirit of God. A natural person, then, is one without the Holy Spirit. Here the emphasis lies on the natural person's inability to understand revelation.¹¹⁴ The natural person does not have spiritual discernment. The verb "to discern" (ἀνακρίνεται) is difficult to translate, but is very important given that it occurs ten times in this epistle and nowhere else in Paul's writing: Thus, it is likely that it is a Corinthian word that Paul is using polemically. By using this verb Paul argues that the natural person lacks the ability to make appropriate judgments about what God is doing in the world.

Paul contrasts the natural and spiritual person by maintaining that the spiritual person (πνευματικὸς) is able to discern (ἀνακρίνεται) all things. In verse 10 Paul argued that the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God, and here he maintains that spiritual people are able to know all things through the Spirit. Paul is not arguing that

¹¹³Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 116.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 117.

spiritual people are able to know everything, but that they are able to know things about God that were previously hidden from them. Therefore, Paul's point is that a person with the Spirit is able to make proper judgments about God's ways.

In contrast to the Corinthian understanding of spirituality, which involved experience and ecstasy, the Christian religion is a revealed religion. Furthermore, as Paul has made clear, God discloses his revelation through the Spirit, and the Spirit reveals God in Scripture. The content of Paul's preaching, and Scripture itself, does not boast of elegance and words of human wisdom, but in them the Spirit reveals. Christian theology confesses that God has revealed himself by speaking, and this speaking is from the Father, through the Son who became incarnate, and is completed by the Spirit who, in the Scripture, makes the wisdom of God known by teaching the Word of Christ that he received from the Father.

2 Timothy 3:16

Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 are some of the most important words in Christian theology, specifically concerning evangelical theologies of revelation. The doctrine of inspiration is inferred from Paul's contention that all of Scripture originates with God's communicative activity. In the words preceding (v. 15), Paul exhorts Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings (ἱερὰ γράμματα), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."¹¹⁵ This phrase is likely used because of Timothy's Jewish background, since this terminology was used among Greek-speaking Jews to designate the Old Testament.¹¹⁶ This admonition reminded Timothy of his inspired source of

¹¹⁵All sacred writings (ἱερὰ γράμματα), was a phrase used by Josephus to refer to the Old Testament canon. See, Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities, Books 8-10: Translation and Commentary*, trans. Paul Spilsbury and Christopher T. Begg, (Brill, 2005), 5:210.

¹¹⁶George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque

instruction in the Scriptures.¹¹⁷

Having encouraged Timothy to be nourished by the sacred writings Paul grounds his exhortation by providing a comment on the nature and character of God's revelation. In 2 Timothy 3:16, he asserts, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

First, it is important to consider what Paul means by, "all Scripture" (πᾶσα γραφή). The noun γραφή most simply means writing.¹¹⁸ While the term γραφή can refer to any writing, it is almost exclusively used in the New Testament to refer to the Old Testament.¹¹⁹ Considering the context of 2 Timothy, where one of Paul's main concerns is grounding Timothy's ministry in Scripture, it is most likely that Paul is referring to the Old Testament canon.¹²⁰

Paul's use of the term πᾶσα, which is best translated as "all," not "every," indicates that Paul is here thinking of Scripture as a whole, not its individual parts.¹²¹

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 443.

¹¹⁷Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *I, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1992), 233.

¹¹⁸Γραφή can refer to a brief piece of writing (1 Chron 28:19), an individual passage of Scripture (Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; Acts 1:16; Rom 11:2; James 2:8), the plural form τὰς γραφὰς can designate collectively all the parts of Scripture (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:24; Luke 24:27; Acts 17:2) and the singular form of γραφή can refer to Scripture as a whole (Acts 8:32; John 20:9 2 Peter 1:20). For more detailed usage see, Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 206.

¹¹⁹See. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 585.

¹²⁰The term γραφή is typically reserved as a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. However, Peter uses the term in reference to the writings of Paul in 2 Pet 3:16, which indicates that the early church was putting Paul's writings on the level of Old Testament Scripture. See Michael Green, *Second Epistle of Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1987), 147–49.

¹²¹There has been serious debate over whether to translate πᾶσα as every or all. Grammatically, both options are possible. Given the context, it is clear that Paul is encouraging Timothy to center his ministry on Scripture. Therefore, it is unlikely that a translation option that calls into question the origin particular portions of Scripture cannot be preferable. Mounce maintains, "It is out of place within the context to introduce the note of the supposed unreliability of some Scripture. Elsewhere in this passage it appears that Paul is viewing Scripture as a whole, and therefore, the translation 'all' is given." William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Lynn A. Losie, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville:

However, as Knight notes, “There is no essential difference in meaning. ‘All Scripture’ perceives the Scripture as a whole, and ‘every Scripture’ perceives it in terms of all its component parts.”¹²² The scope is extensive, leaving no text of “Scripture” unaccounted for.¹²³ Paul is encouraging Timothy to center his life on all revelation from God because all revelation is God-breathed.

The term θεόπνευστος only occurs here in the Greek Bible. It is a compound of the two Greek words θεός “God” and πνέω “to breathe.” It has generally been translated “inspired” (Vulgate *divinitus inspirata*), but “God-breathed” more accurately reflects the etymology of the compound Greek words.¹²⁴ Most simply, this term denotes the source of Scripture: Scripture is to product of the creative breath of God.¹²⁵ Paul was not instructing Timothy about a new doctrine, but reminding him of the source of all Scripture, something he undoubtedly already knew.¹²⁶ Furthermore, it is important to note that, as is common with words that end in -τος, it is passive “God breathed,” not active, “Scripture emits the breath of God.”¹²⁷

Calvin comments, “In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he declares that it is divinely inspired; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversies that men ought to

Thomas Nelson, 2000), 566. Towner notes, “Given the functional distributive way in which Scripture is envisaged, the logical conclusion is that Paul wished to affirm that divine inspiration applies evenly, text by text, to the entire Old Testament.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 588. Therefore, the translation should emphasize the notion that Paul is viewing Scripture as a whole.

¹²² Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 445.

¹²³ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 587.

¹²⁴ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566.

¹²⁵ Ibid. On this point see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1980), 245–96.

¹²⁶ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 164.

¹²⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566. Warfield makes this point in Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 245–96.

receive it with reverence.”¹²⁸ Calvin continues by arguing, “This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare.”¹²⁹ Therefore, according to Calvin, “We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.”¹³⁰ Paul insists that Scripture is God-breathed because he wants to emphasize the authority of the Scripture as coming from God. Paul indicates that they are divinely-inspired and as they proceed from the mouth of God they participate in their divinely intended purpose related to the plan of salvation.

However, it is important to consider, in light of previous passages, if Paul’s use of θεόπνευστος can be informed by trinitarian operations. It is natural to connect the term θεόπνευστος with the work of the Spirit, who is described as wind or breath (Acts 2:2). Certainly, Paul does not mean to indicate that the Spirit is operating independently in revelatory activity, that the Spirit alone breathes Scripture. Rather, the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, with one breath, speaks Scripture. Jesus indicates that the Spirit says nothing other than what he hears. Similarly, Jesus does and says nothing other than what he receives from the Father. Therefore, to consider Scripture as God-breathed (θεόπνευστος), one must begin with a conception of trinitarian communicative activity. Accordingly, Scripture as God-breathed (θεόπνευστος) fits well with the earlier discussion: God the Father speaks an authoritative Word, God the Son mediates the Father’s authoritative speech, and God the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, completes the communicative activity of the Father and Son. Therefore, the Spirit is active in inspiring

¹²⁸John Calvin, *The Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 248.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 249.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

the Scripture that is θεόπνευστος because he speaks every Word that he receives from the Father and Son.

For Paul, since Scripture is God's speech it is inherently profitable (ὠφέλιμος). Mounce suggests that this term, "is a technical term in the Pastoral Epistles for the doctrinal formulation of Scripture (cf. especially 1 Timothy 4:13)."¹³¹ The Christian life and Christian doctrine is not founded on myths, as Paul emphasizes elsewhere (Rom 15:4), but on God's speech. Mounce maintains that the rest of the verse flows from Paul's assumption that because Scripture comes from God, since it is God-breathed.¹³² In Scripture God instructs, corrects, and trains his people. Indeed, the very words of Scripture are the very words of God and are true, authoritative, and dependable.

2 Peter 1:20-21

The first chapter of Peter's second epistle is marked by an urgency and diligence to preach the gospel. Peter is resolved, before his death, to remind his readers about the truth of the gospel. He calls his readers to live virtuously, grounding their lives in the saving work of Christ.¹³³ However, Peter is aware that there are those who wish to deceive and misguide those to whom he is ministering. Apparently, he is concerned about false teachers who were denying the second coming of Christ. Peter combats the false teachers by appealing to observable history by arguing in verse 16, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Peter is attempting to underscore the veracity of his information by appealing to his eyewitness account. He argues, "we ourselves heard," and, "we were with him on the holy mountain," in appeal

¹³¹Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman, 2003), 311.

to his first hand account of the Transfiguration and the direct divine speech that he, along with James and John, heard on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8).

However, Peter's argument against the false teachers continues as he appeals to a more sure prophetic word (βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον).¹³⁴ Schreiner argues that "the prophetic word almost certainly refers to the Old Testament Scriptures."¹³⁵ It is to this more sure prophetic word—Scripture—that attention should be paid because it is the Spirit's work of revelation. In 1:20-21, he argues that "knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Peter insists that divine revelation can be trusted, and it must be heeded, because it originates with God, not with the will of humans. The biblical authors did not make prophecy, but were influenced by the Spirit.

Peter's opponents rejected the authority of Old Testament prophecy as divine in origin. The false teachers that Peter is combating believe that the prophets might have received signs, dreams, envision, but their prophecies were their own human interpretations—not God's (2 Pet 2:1).

There is a question of interpretation regarding the phrase ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται. This phrase is either a statement about the interpretation of the Old Testament or a statement about the origin of prophecy. Bauckham arguing for the former position, argues, "the Holy Spirit of God inspired not only the prophet's dreams and visions, but also their interpretations of them, so that when they spoke the prophecies recorded in

¹³⁴Bauckham maintains that this phrase merely refers to the fact that Peter has a firm grasp on the information, while Neyrey contends that Peter is still referring to the Transfiguration. Both options, though plausible, are unlikely. See Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 224; Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 178.

¹³⁵Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 319. Schreiner points to the fact that verses 20-21 support this position because they refer to "prophecy of Scripture." Specifically, the word Scripture (γραφῆς) reveals that writings are in view.

Scripture they were spokesmen for God himself.”¹³⁶ Green advocates the latter view, contending, “since a contrast is set up between the prophet undertaking his own interpretation of the divine will (1:20) over and against prophecy being the result and activity of God.”¹³⁷ Implicit in Peter’s argument against false teachers is an assumption about the origin of revelation, therefore the view that argues for divine inspiration is more likely. Peter, attacking the view of his opponents, argues that revelation originates in God, specifically the Spirit.¹³⁸ Schreiner notes that prophecy, “by the apostles does not come from them, ultimately, they have a divine source, for prophecy comes from God.”¹³⁹ Prophecy refers to the inspired utterances of the ancient prophets, which were written down as Scripture (2 Chr 32:32; Ezra 5:1; Matt 13:14).¹⁴⁰ Rather, by its very definition, prophecy is a divine work that can in no way be attributed to the ingenuity and wisdom of humanity. Revelation in Scripture is immune from the compromising will of humans.¹⁴¹ Therefore, Peter argues that revelation can be trusted as authoritative and accurate because it is brought about through the revelatory activity of the Spirit.

Further, Peter is not hesitant to say that human beings spoke (ἐλάλησαν), and that they spoke with their own personalities and literary styles.¹⁴² Therefore, both human

¹³⁶Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 235.

¹³⁷Gene Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 232.

¹³⁸Paul uses the term γίνεται to indicate that God’s revelation does not originate in humanity.

¹³⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324.

¹⁴⁰Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 232.

¹⁴¹Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 235.

¹⁴²Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324.

beings and God are fully involved in the process of inspiration, a doctrine called concursus.¹⁴³ Commenting on the process of concursus, Schreiner argues,

The personality and gifts of the human authors were not squelched or suppressed. We can detect their different literary styles even today. And yet the words they spoke did not cancel out the truth that they spoke the word of God. Concursus means that both God and human beings contributed to the prophetic word. Ultimately, however, and most significantly, these human words are God's words.¹⁴⁴

The doctrine of concursus can account for Peter's language of the prophets being "carried along by the Holy Spirit." Calvin argues, "They were moved — not that they were bereaved of mind, (as the Gentiles imagined their prophets to have been,) but because they dared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary."¹⁴⁵ Green notes, "The inspiration of Scripture does not mean the supersession of the normal mental functions of the human author. The Holy Spirit did not use instruments; he used humans. God's way is ever one of truth through personality, as was perfectly demonstrated at the incarnation."¹⁴⁶ The perspective of both the Old and New Testament is that the Spirit spoke through the prophets (Num 11:25-26; 1 Sam 10:6; Neh 9:30; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; Eph 3:5) Therefore, for Peter, the human words of prophecy are the result of men speaking as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Men spoke, but they spoke from God, as their utterance had their source in God and not in themselves.

The theme of this passage is that we can trust God's revelation because it comes from God. The Spirit is a trustworthy and authoritative author because he speaks and teaches in accordance with his mode of subsistence. The same God whom the

¹⁴³See Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 83–96.

¹⁴⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324.

¹⁴⁵John Calvin, *The Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 391.

¹⁴⁶Green, *Second Epistle of Peter and Jude*, 103.

apostles heard speak in the transfiguration also spoke through the prophets.¹⁴⁷ We can rely on Scripture because it is God speaking. False prophets speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord (Jer 23:16; Ezek 13:3). But true revelation comes from God.

In summary, the biblical texts that have been considered do not provide an exhaustive account of the work of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation. However, they do provide significant value in helping theologians understand trinitarian operations and divine self-disclosure. Among other things, these texts demonstrate the following: (1) The Holy Spirit does not provide new revelation, but helps Jesus' followers understand more fully God's self-disclosure in Christ. The Spirit does not speak a new Word, a Word distinct than the one spoken by the Father and Son, but he only testifies in accordance with his mode of subsistence, from the Father and through the Son. (2) The way in which the Spirit reveals God is in the biblical text. The normative communicative activity, as demonstrated through previous exegesis, is for the Spirit to speak in and through the Scriptures. (3) The Holy Spirit does not speak on his own authority, but speaks what he hears from the Father and Son. Divine authority does not terminate on a specific person, but each person, Father, Son, and Spirit, participate equally in authoritative discourse. (4) Human wisdom is not sufficient for knowing God, but humans are dependent on revelation and illumination. Only the Holy Spirit can interpret and teach God's wisdom revealed in Scripture to humanity. Our reception of the Word of God is enabled by gracious work of the triune God. Without divine revelation, humanity is left to empty and

¹⁴⁷Douglas Harink, *I & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 113. Harink further notes, "The unity of the Scriptures, that is, their coherence in speaking of the one God and his Son Jesus Christ, is not something constituted by a theological idea, worldview, doctrine, practice, or method of theological interpretation. The unity of Scripture is constituted by God the Holy Spirit who speaks prophetically in the Old Testament, also by God the Father who draws Old Testament prophecy toward its goal as witness to Jesus Christ, who as the Son of God is himself the content of Old Testament prophecy. The unity of the Old and New Testaments is given in God's own Triune action with respect to the text of Scripture, an action in which the church by the Holy Spirit is granted participation." Ibid., 115.

meaningless myths. Humans are in need of divine revelation and illumination. (5) To speak of Scripture as being God-breathed is to speak of a trinitarian activity—not an independent work of the Spirit. Specifically, the term θεόπνευστος should be understood as the communicative activity of the triune God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit each participate the creative, revelatory, breathing out of Scripture. (6) All Scripture originates in God, not the will of humans. Humans do not initiate the process of revelation, but are the recipients of God’s revelatory activity.

The Spirit’s Work and the Authority of Scripture

Having considered the theological implications of the Spirit’s mode of subsistence, his procession, and several biblical texts that describe the work of the Spirit in divine self-revelation, it is essential to draw several theological conclusions that relate to the authorial agency of the Spirit and biblical authority. The Spirit’s authorial activity relates directly to his mode of subsistence. Therefore, this account of biblical authority and the communicative activity of the Spirit considers three important ideas: (1) biblical authority, the Spirit, and the efficacy of divine authorial intention; (2) biblical authority, the illuminating activity of the Spirit, and Christian interpretation; (3) biblical authority, the Spirit, and Christian theological witness. After considering these important theological implications, this chapter will reconsider the accounts of biblical authority presented by Wright and Grenz in the light of the trinitarian framework of biblical authority that is been presented thus far.

Biblical Authority, The Spirit, and the Efficacy of Divine Authorial Intention

In addition to the previous demonstrations that ground biblical authority in the communicative activity of God the Father and God the Son, the Bible is authoritative because in Scripture the Spirit speaks efficaciously to accomplish all of the authorial

intentions of the Father and Son. Authorial intention is an important and sometimes all-consuming topic in biblical interpretation and hermeneutics. Perhaps the greatest challenge presented to Christian theology in postmodern philosophy is the so-called death of the author. In response to the authorial challenge, Christian exegetes and theologians have sought to look for authorial intention and meaning in the text of Scripture. However, if meaning is tied to authorial intention, then meaning cannot simply be identified with the intention of the human author.¹⁴⁸ The authorial intention of the divine author must also come into consideration. Packer notes, “God’s meaning and message through each passage, when set in its total biblical context, exceeds what the human author had in mind.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, since the entire canon is God’s Word we can expect to see an organic unity that frees the reader to read each text in the context of the whole and the whole in light of each particular text.¹⁵⁰

Christian theology can benefit from an account of authorial intention that considers what God is doing in and with the biblical text. God the Spirit speaks the efficacious Word that he hears and received from God the Father through God the Son. The Spirit’s speech accomplishes the authorial intentions of the Father and Son. What God is accomplishing in the Scriptures by the power of the Spirit is more than an impartation of knowledge, but also a transformation of the reader. “Theologians are right to try and restate the main points of biblical discourse in conceptually clear propositions but wrong when they reduce ‘what is said’ in Scripture to its informative content only,”

¹⁴⁸Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 75.

¹⁴⁹J. I. Packer, “Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and Inerrancy,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1971), 147–48.

¹⁵⁰Lint, *The Fabric of Theology*, 77. Lints goes on to note, “It is wrong to suggest that either the divine authorship overwhelms the humanity of the text or that the reality of the human authorship precludes us from seeing unity in the overall text placed there by the divine author.” Ibid.

Vanhoozer argues.¹⁵¹ Therefore, it is proper to speak of authorial intention that includes referential meaning, but also has room for the transformation of the reader.¹⁵²

Nothing that God has set out to accomplish in, or with, Holy Scriptures will fail. Bavinck argues that the Word “creates and maintains, judges and kills, re-creates and renews, and always accomplishes what it is meant to accomplish and never returns empty.”¹⁵³ The Spirit as author always speaks an efficacious Word that is never without power because in Scripture, he is communicatively present.¹⁵⁴ The Holy Spirit, then, is an authoritative author because he effectively communicates divine revelation for the purpose of informing and transforming the reader.

To speak of the Spirit accomplishing God’s intentions in Scripture is to indicate a distinctly Christian ontology of the Bible. The Bible is the authoritative Word of God. To submit to the teaching of Scripture is to submit to the teaching of the Spirit. To deny the teaching of Scripture is to deny the teaching of the Spirit. The Spirit consistently sustains Scripture by efficaciously speaking the Word of the Son that comes from the Father. He instructs, teaches, and reminds disciples of Jesus of all that the Lord has said.

Further, divine authorial intention must be informed by trinitarian operations. The authorial intention of the Spirit in Scripture is to refer the reader back to the *Logos*, which is the Son (Rom 8:9). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; therefore, the Spirit’s authorial intention is to make Christ known in the text because Christ is the Word that the

¹⁵¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Love’s Wisdom: The Authority of Scripture’s Form and Content for Faith’s Understanding and Theological Judgment,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 3 (January, 2011): 262.

¹⁵²Cf. John J. O’Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

¹⁵³Herman Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 458.

¹⁵⁴Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 65.

Father has spoken. The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of the Father, so the Spirit's authorial intention is to reveal the things of God the Father, who is the origin of all divine speech.

Therefore, readers of the Bible are ultimately also recipients and addressees in which the author's intentions are being completed. As recipients of God's Word they are taught, instructed, and guided by the Spirit who speaks the Word of Christ. God the Father speaks through God the Son by means of God the Spirit to address his people directly. "The act of reading the Bible draws the reader into the theo-dramatic action and solicits a response," notes Vanhoozer.¹⁵⁵ In this sense, the Bible is authoritative because through it God as author accomplishes exactly what he intends. Therefore, the Spirit renders the Word effectual and accomplishes the author's intentions by teaching the Words of the Son that he receives from the Father.

Biblical Authority, Illumination, and Christian Interpretation

The two principal works of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture are inspiration and illumination.¹⁵⁶ Vanhoozer notes,

The Scriptures are the Spirit's work from first to last. The Spirit is involved in the very messy historical process of producing Scripture – prompting, appropriating, and coordinating human discourse to present God's Word – as well as the process of bringing about understanding of Scripture among present-day readers. The traditional names for these modes of participation are *inspiration* and *illumination* respectively.¹⁵⁷

As discussed, "inspiration" refers to the work of the triune God in producing Scripture. "Illumination" is the term that refers to the enlightenment by God of the human

¹⁵⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 67.

¹⁵⁶J. B. Webster, *The Domain of the Word* (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 50. Inspiration is the narrower term, indicating the Spirit's superintendence and moving of the processes of Scripture's production. Illumination refers to Spirit's act in relation to the church's receiving the Word of God – not only the interpretation of Scripture but also the recognition that Scripture is God's Word.

¹⁵⁷Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 226.

mind for understanding the things of God.¹⁵⁸ It is often noted that the Bible is authoritative because it is Spirit-inspired, but what is the relationship between illumination and authority?

All of God's actions are authoritative. God the Spirit acts as he illumines the Scripture. Consequently, illumination is authoritative. The Bible is authoritative because it is in and through the text that the Spirit of God illumines the church and individual interpreters, drawing them into deeper knowledge and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Illumination is never disconnected from the Word. Illumination is the authoritative work of God the Holy Spirit to enlighten and reorient people, through the authoritative Biblical text, to the triune God.¹⁵⁹

The Spirit authoritatively helps people to recognize the Bible as God's Word and to interpret it rightly by opening their hearts and minds to these realities.¹⁶⁰ The Spirit is the one who accomplishes this work because his work of illumination refers back to the Spirit's antecedent deity and personhood, which is procession, in which the mission of illumination has its ground.¹⁶¹ The Holy Spirit is the efficient cause for illumination as he teaches Christians the Word of the Father and the Son. In illumination the Scripture is fixed in our minds as the Word of God by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶² Robert Letham notes, "The ministry of the Spirit is to speak of the Son."¹⁶³ Illumination from the

¹⁵⁸See Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright, eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), s.v., "Illumination," by Carl Trueman.

¹⁵⁹See Trueman, "Illumination"; Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

¹⁶⁰See Henk Van Den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) and Henk Van Den Belt, "Scripture as the Voice of God: The Continuing Importance of Autopistia," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 4 (October, 2011): 434–47, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2400.2011.00593.x.

¹⁶¹Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 53.

¹⁶²John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1:38.

¹⁶³Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*

Spirit is never separated from the Word. The Spirit of Christ ministers Christ, the content of Scripture, to its readers.¹⁶⁴ The entirety of Christian Scripture is Spirit-breathed, and through the illumination of the text the Spirit refers the reader to the content of Christian Scripture, namely the Son.

However, interpreters must proceed with caution. As Donald Macleod comments, “We may not give to our own exposition the force of revelation.”¹⁶⁵ Not all interpretations are authoritative; the Bible, and the Spirit’s illumination of the Bible, are authoritative. Thus, a proper notion of biblical authority and illumination must insist that it is Scripture *properly interpreted* that is authoritative for Christian faith and life.¹⁶⁶

Christian readers need to maintain a specific posture towards Scripture, as it always functions as the *norma normans* (“norming norm”). Scripture stands above every interpretive community. Rather than trumpeting objective certainty and thus authority in interpretation, Christian interpreters are called to a continual stance of epistemological humility.¹⁶⁷ This humility does not stem from God’s inability to reveal, but from humanity’s lowered capacity to perceive. Thus, Christian interpreters trust God’s Spirit, not their interpretive ability, to illumine the Bible, and in the process of interpretation listen to the Spirit who speaks all that he hears.¹⁶⁸ This affirmation does not diminish the important work of exegesis and theological study, it simply affirms that such work is

(Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 58.

¹⁶⁴Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 429.

¹⁶⁵Donald Macleod, “Jesus and Scripture,” in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 94–95.

¹⁶⁶Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 75.

¹⁶⁷J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹⁶⁸It is important to note that illumination and interpretation are distinct acts, but illumination is never separate from interpretation. Not all interpretation is illumined, but illumination only comes through interpretation. Thus, illumination is never severed from the objective meaning of the text.

futile without the Spirit's work of illumination.

Christians trust that in Scripture the Spirit is teaching the Word of the Father and Son, which he does authoritatively through the Word because in illumination the Spirit continues to speak all that he hears from the Father and the Son. Indeed, the one who inspires Scripture cannot contradict himself when he illumines it.¹⁶⁹ Though our governing affections are corrupt, vain, and confident in our own intellectual powers, and without a knowledge of God, in illumination the Spirit who knows God's depth and is in himself infinitely wise, communicates a knowledge of God through the Word. Illumination, then, happens in the context of triune communicative activity.

Therefore, the church is continually being called to a faithful reading of the biblical text, because it is authoritative for Christian faith and life. Through the authoritative act of illumination, the Spirit does a work of ministering the words of Scripture, not through manipulation or moderation of the text, but through enlightenment of the mind leading the reader into meaning. The end of reading Scripture is to know God, who is its primary author and interpreter. In illumination, the Spirit acts authoritatively to make God known because the Word of Christ, spoken by the Spirit of Christ, creates faith in Christ.

Biblical Authority, the Spirit, and Christian Theological Witness

The Bible is authoritative because it is through the text that the Spirit acts authoritatively by helping readers become participants in God's redemptive story. Evangelical theology has historically maintained a very high view of Scripture. However, having a high view of Scripture requires more than reading, it requires participation. A trinitarian account of biblical authority maintains a very high view of Scripture while also

¹⁶⁹Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 427.

providing a means to embody a high view of Scripture. This is what Vanhoozer calls the drama of doctrine. He argues, “The act of reading the Bible draws the reader into the theo-dramatic action and solicits a response.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, “The Bible is not just our authoritative script; it is one of the leading players in the ongoing drama, interrupting our complacency, demanding its reader’s response.”¹⁷¹

A trinitarian account of biblical authority maintains that in Scripture, the Spirit not only guides the church into proper referential meaning; the Spirit, through the reading of Scripture, also guides the church into right and proper action. Eckhard Schnabel argues,

What Scripture does follows from what Scripture is, which is in turn tied to who God is. Because Scripture tells the story of God, the Creator of the world and King of his people, working out the salvation of humanity, and because God has inspired that story, written by different people at different times, so as to make it his word, Scripture draws its readers into the story and transforms them.¹⁷²

Scripture is not only an authoritative witness to redemption, but is an efficacious agent of that redemption.¹⁷³ Accordingly, the Spirit is the channel or medium of the communicative act as well as its efficacy.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the doctrine of biblical authority includes the concept that the Bible has the capacity to stimulate the church into proper interpretive action and judgment.¹⁷⁵

In Scripture, the Spirit equips the people of God with a communicative

¹⁷⁰Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 67. Evangelical theology has often included the insistence that a high view of Scripture is demonstrated the notion of living out Scripture.

¹⁷¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 48, no. 1 (2005): 111.

¹⁷²E. J. Schnabel, “Scripture,” ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 42.

¹⁷³Lints, *The Fabric of Theology*, 262.

¹⁷⁴Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 261.

¹⁷⁵J. B. Webster, “Authority of Scripture,” ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 727.

capacity to witness.¹⁷⁶ The Spirit does this because, as is proper to his relational subsistence (procession), he points God's people to Christ, the eternal Logos of the Father. The Son instructs his disciples to be witnesses of the gospel as he promises to send the Spirit of the Father to them (Luke 24:48-49) for the purpose of witnessing in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). He transforms readers into witnesses, observers into participants. The Spirit is the one who testifies to Christ and his work is to make testifiers of Christ. Scripture is, therefore, a means through which the Spirit creates worshipers and witnesses of the triune God. J. Todd Billings argues, "God's final purpose in the gospel is to transform his people into the image of his Son, so that they might truly love God and neighbor, and all Scripture is profitable for accomplishing this end."¹⁷⁷ Thus, in Scripture the Spirit creates witnesses to the work of the triune God, witnesses who go out into the world, witnesses about Jesus Christ and the coming of God's Kingdom.

Given the dogmatic claims related to the authoritative work of the Spirit and their relationship to biblical authority, as well as the biblical testimony of the work of the Spirit, how should one evaluate the theological formulations of Wright and Grenz? Is Wright's proposal of the Bible's delegated authority faithful to the categories that the Bible presents for itself? Does Grenz's proposal of the Bible as the instrumentality of the Spirit capture what it means for the Bible to be authoritative? This chapter has argued that not only is the Bible authoritative because it originates with the speech of the Father, which testifies of, and is mediated by, the Son, but that the Bible is also authoritative because it is completed by the efficacious work of the Spirit. The Bible is authoritative because the Spirit completes the communicative intentions of the Godhead, illumines readers of Scripture by communicating the knowledge of Christ, and transforms rebels

¹⁷⁶Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 267.

¹⁷⁷Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 133.

into witnesses and participants of God's redemptive purposes. In light of this argument, this chapter will now consider the validity of the theological formulations of both Wright and Grenz.

Wright's primary task in his account of biblical authority is to undermine the traditional Protestant account of authority and replace it with a rendering of biblical authority that he believes is more faithful to the biblical witness. He replaces the common understanding of biblical authority with a narrational, mediated, and delegated view of biblical authority. For Wright, to speak of biblical authority is not speak about an ontological formal principle of Scripture, but rather, to speak of God's authority exercised through Scripture.

Wright suggests that evangelicals have misplaced the locus of authority by maintaining that the Bible is itself ontologically authoritative. He maintains that the Bible itself does not warrant this view, as it constantly ascribes all authority to God. Therefore, for Wright, biblical authority must be understood within the context of God's authority, of which the Bible is a witness, and even a vehicle. He believes that this notion of biblical authority is more dynamic than current evangelical models and, more importantly, compatible with the Bible's presentation of itself.

In contrast to Wright's method, the biblical writers themselves appeal to the origin and ontology of Scripture when attempting to demonstrate its authority (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Wright's comments on 2 Timothy 3:16 demonstrate this problem. He argues, "This text was written, not so much to give people the right beliefs about Scripture, as to encourage them to study it for themselves."¹⁷⁸ Exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16 suggests the opposite. People are encouraged to study Scripture themselves precisely because of what it is, the triune God's Word. Wright's reticence to speak ontologically about the Bible seems to miss Paul's point, namely, that it is God-breathed. Ignoring the

¹⁷⁸Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 133.

fundamental issues of inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, and clarity do not make them go away. For responsible theologians, theologians who are first and foremost doing theology for the church, these issues are central.

While Wright may be correct to assert that God exercises his authority through Scripture, does that not indicate what Scripture is? One can affirm the narrative context of biblical authority and still affirm that the words of Scripture are God's word.¹⁷⁹ Does God's use of Scripture in the economy of redemption not suggest something formally about Scripture itself? For Wright, it seems, that there is a distant relationship between author (God and man) and the text, which demonstrates the weakness of Wright's appeal to mediated and delegated authority. Wright's account of biblical authority is almost unrecognizable from previous Protestant accounts of biblical authority because he refuses to speak ontologically about what Scripture is. A trinitarian account of biblical authority is superior to Wright's proposal because it maintains that the Bible is the authoritative speech of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Grenz's presentation of biblical authority is equally problematic, and for similar reasons. Grenz's definition of inspiration is insufficient. He argues that inspiration is, "The work of the Holy Spirit in influencing the authors and compilers of Scripture to produce writings which adequately reflect what God desired to communicate to us."¹⁸⁰ This definition of inspiration fails to appropriate any formal category of the Bible itself by failing to speak ontologically about what the Bible is. His view of inspiration is inadequate, in part, due to his view of revelation. For Grenz, revelation is an event that precedes Scripture that Scripture merely records. He argues, "The Spirit's essential role in the formation of Scripture and in the application of the biblical message in the life of the faith community suggests that pneumatology is the bridge between the revelation and

¹⁷⁹For more on this point, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 1:523.

¹⁸⁰Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 382.

the Bible as the instrument in our coming to know God.” His distinction between revelation and inspiration forces Grenz to separate the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Spirit - a problem that is avoided by an account of trinitarian communicative activity.

Inevitably, Grenz’s presentation of biblical authority is rooted in his understanding of inspiration and revelation. For Grenz, the Bible is authoritative because it is through the biblical text that the Spirit acts authoritatively. For Grenz, by acknowledging the Bible, we are actually acknowledging the Holy Spirit who addresses us through its pages and, therefore, Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit chooses to speak. However, Grenz never specifies exactly what action the Spirit is performing through the instrumentality of the Bible. Further, in acknowledging the Bible as a work of the Spirit, Grenz fails to account for how Scripture’s content is related to the work of the Spirit. A trinitarian account of biblical authority as it relates to the Spirit confesses that the Spirit does indeed speak, but he only speaks that which he receives. The Spirit never speaks another Word, something that Grenz does not make clear. Thus, Grenz only speaks of the authoritative function of the Bible, but never as a formal principle.

The formulations from Wright and Grenz would benefit significantly from a trinitarian approach to biblical authority. Wright and Grenz spend a great deal of effort and energy focusing on the relationship between the functional efficacy of the Word and biblical authority. Though their presentations differ, they would both affirm that the Bible is authoritative insofar as God acts authoritatively through Scripture. While that is true, it is incomplete. The Bible is more than functionally authoritative. The Bible does not merely have a delegated authority, nor is it merely the instrumentality of the Spirit. The Bible is the Word of the Father, about the Son, mediated by the Son, and taught by the Holy Spirit.

A trinitarian theology of authority understands the Bible to be authoritative because it is the Word of the Spirit, which he receives from the Father and the Son. As a formal principle, the Bible is the efficacious Word of the Spirit. Specifically, the Bible is authoritative because the Spirit is the authoritative author who subsists as the one who proceeds from the Father and the Son. A trinitarian account of authority appeals to the divine origin of Scripture; that is, Scripture is authoritative because of what it is - God's Word. The origin of Scripture has implications not only for its function, but also its ontology. As Scripture speaks, so God the Spirit speaks. In Scripture, the Spirit speaks by teaching, instructing, and reminding the church of Jesus' Words. No communion with God is possible except by the Spirit. Thus, no communication comes from God except by the Spirit – the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF A TRINITARIAN ACCOUNT OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

Summary

This dissertation has argued that the Bible is authoritative because it is God's Word. Specifically, Scripture is authoritative because it is the Word of God the Father, about and mediated by God the Son, and completed by the efficacious breath of God the Spirit. Scripture is authoritative because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all speak, with one voice, an authoritative Word. This dissertation has maintained that Scripture is authoritative because it is the triune God's speech, which is to say, it carries the same authority as the triune God. The authorship of the Father, Son, and Spirit relates precisely to their mode of subsistence and ultimately refers back to the one divine essence. The Bible is authoritative because each person participates in a communion of authoritative and revelatory speech.

Before outlining several of the theological and pastoral implications of a trinitarian account of biblical authority, it is important to summarize briefly the argument to this point. Chapter one demonstrated that there is an authority crisis in evangelical theology. Evangelical accounts of biblical authority appropriate language pertaining to the doctrine of God to their accounts of biblical authority. However, these accounts have generally failed to make use of the trinitarian terminology that is available through the rich Christian tradition. The Bible teaches that each person of the Godhead speaks authoritatively. Therefore God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all authoritative authors. It is necessary, therefore, to consider wisely how trinitarian language can be appropriately applied to accounts of biblical authority. Specifically, it is proper to consider how appealing to a trinitarian grammar might thicken an evangelical explanation of biblical authority.

Chapter 2 argued that the Bible is authoritative because of its divine origin, the unbegotten Father. This chapter began by considering two very different accounts of biblical authority: the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI) and A. T. B. McGowan's *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture*. First, the CSBI was shown to be a strong account of biblical authority in the evangelical tradition. According to the CSBI, the Bible is authoritative because it is God's Word. According to the formulation of the CSBI, God is an authoritative and perfect speaker. Despite the strength and clarity of this account as it relates to inerrancy and authority, it largely fails to appropriate trinitarian language, which could help to buttress its claims. The CSBI does not properly set God's communicative agency in its trinitarian context. Second, McGowan's pneumatological approach to the doctrine of Scripture was considered. McGowan believes that relocating the doctrine of Scripture into the doctrine of the Spirit will afford evangelicals the theological categories necessary to address properly the doctrine of Scripture. While evangelicals may benefit from aspects of McGowan's proposal, ultimately it does not accomplish the goals that McGowan claims. By omitting consideration of trinitarian communicative activity, McGowan unnecessarily separates the ministry of the Word from the ministry of the Spirit, making the Bible simply a function of the Spirit.

After considering these soundings from evangelicalism, the doctrine of God was considered as it relates to the Father being a communicative agent. It was demonstrated dogmatically and biblically that the Father is the source of all things, including triune communicative activity. By examining the Father's unbegottenness and *paternitas*, as well as biblical texts (John 7:14-24, John 12:44-50, and Heb 1:1-2) chapter two argued that the Father is an authoritative communicative agent and the person of the godhead who initiates all revelatory activity. The Father is the *fons*, the source of all things, including divine speech. Biblical authority, then, must be grounded first in the Father, the ultimate author, font, and Creator.

Chapter 3 argued that the Bible is authoritative because the Son is both the authoritative mediatorial *agent* through whom the Father speaks and at the same time the authoritative *content* of the Father's speech. The chapter began by considering two evangelical works that use Christological and incarnational language in formulating their accounts of Scripture. Peter Enns and Kenton Sparks maintain, though somewhat differently, that the incarnation is analogous to inscripturation. The Bible, according to Enns, is an example of God enthusiastically participating in the finitude and messiness of humanity. Sparks tries to strike a relationship between the authority of the Bible and biblical criticism by suggesting that the Bible is ultimately a human document, appropriated by God for his redemptive purposes. Therefore, according to both Enns and Sparks, we should expect the Bible to contain errors, theological diversity, and every other characteristic that would be expected of documents with the historical location of the various books that make up the Christian canon. While these accounts are correct to assert that the Bible is authored by humans, they fail to consider properly divine authorship, particularly the authorship of the Son.

Next, chapter 3 demonstrated dogmatically and biblically that the divine Son, as the one begotten by the Father, is the author of Scripture who is specifically the content and mediator of the Father's Word. Through a consideration of sonship, incarnation, and biblical texts (John 5:19-24; 8:25-29; 14:8-11; and Rev 1:1-3), the Son was shown to be an authoritative communicative agent. Thus, the Scripture is authoritative because it is the Word of the Son.

Chapter 4 argued that the Bible is authoritative because it is breathed out by the Spirit who, being spoken by the Father and Son, is the authorial agent who brings about the divine intentions and effects of the triune God. Specifically, the Spirit teaches the Word of the Father and Christ. The two evangelical accounts of biblical authority that were considered in this chapter were those of N. T. Wright and Stanley Grenz. Wright

maintained that evangelicalism has largely misunderstood biblical authority, primarily because evangelicals have appropriated non-biblical understandings of authority to the biblical text. He argued that the Bible is functionally authoritative because the triune God acts authoritatively through the text. Wright presented an account of narrational authority that leaves out the ontology of the biblical text as God's Word. Grenz presents a similar formulation by arguing that the Bible is authoritative as the Spirit acts authoritatively through it. The Bible is the Spirit's instrument. For Grenz, then, the Bible has a delegated and mediated authority insofar as the Spirit speaks through Scripture. While Grenz is right to discuss the relationship between pneumatology and Scripture, he never discusses the ontological implications of this relationship, and he fails to properly unite the ministry of the Spirit to the ministry of the Word.

Next, chapter 4 demonstrated dogmatically and biblically that the Spirit, the divine person who proceeds from the Father and the Son, is the author of Scripture who is specifically the one who teaches the efficacious Word of the Father and Son. By examining the procession of the Spirit, as well as biblical texts (John 14:26, John 15:26; John 16:12-15, 1 Cor 2:6-16, 2 Tim 3:16, and 2 Pt 1:16-21), chapter 4 argued that the Spirit is the agent who completes all of the authorial intentions of the triune God.

Theological Implications

Having considered the merits of, and theological grounding for, a trinitarian account of biblical authority, it is also essential to consider some of the theological implications of this account, specifically for other doctrines related to revelation. Schnabel argues, "Our doctrine of Scripture as the word of God depends on our view of who God is and what he does."¹ Therefore, a trinitarian conception of revelation has implications for every aspect of bibliology. How then, can the traditional accounts of

¹E. J. Schnabel, "Scripture," ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 36.

inerrancy, sufficiency, and perspicuity, be thickened through the language provided by trinitarian communicative activity?²

Inerrancy

The inerrancy of Scripture is closely related to the authority of Scripture. Any challenge to the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture is a challenge to biblical authority, and any challenge to biblical authority is a challenge to Scripture's trustworthiness. "No other text is as truth-conducive as Scripture," notes Vanhoozer.³ Traditional evangelical accounts of inerrancy have built their argument on the fact that God is true and trustworthy, so he never lies, deceives, or makes mistakes. The Bible is God's revelation; therefore, it must be true, trustworthy, and without error.⁴ Traditionally, the church has believed that Scripture, in its original manuscripts and properly interpreted, is true and without any error or fault in everything that it affirms. Feinberg argues, "Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."⁵ The doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the inspiration of Scripture, which originates from God, whose self-revelation is free from all falsehood, fraud, deceit, and error.

²The goal of the following sections is not to produce a complete doctrinal statement for each stated doctrine, nor is it to speak to every doctrine related to bibliology. Rather, the goal is simply to outline how a trinitarian formulation of authority might impact several doctrines related to bibliology.

³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Truth," ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 822.

⁴See G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); James Merrick and Stephen M Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁵Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 294.

Though the church has faithfully confessed that God's revelation is without fault, the traditional account of biblical inerrancy can be strengthened with an appeal to trinitarian authorship. A trinitarian account of inerrancy confesses that the Father, Son, and Spirit each, according to their mode of subsistence, have spoken truly and inerrantly in the biblical text. A trinitarian account of communicative activity affirms that the Bible is inerrant because God the Father, being the source of all things, and having no ability to deceive, always speaks with perfection. God the Father's Word is perfect and true. The unbegotten Father never speaks a Word of falsehood or deceit because, as the Almighty Creator, all of his speech corresponds perfectly to reality.

Furthermore, the Bible is inerrant because God the Son, the content and mediator of the Father's speech, perfectly receives and speaks the Word that he hears from the Father. Jesus tells the truth (John 5:24) and he continually sustains, upholds, and teaches the perfect Word that he has received from the Father. The Son does not speak or mediate a Word other than the Word that he receives from his Father. According to his mode of subsistence, the Son perfectly communicates the Word that comes from the Father (John 8:14).

Additionally, the Bible is inerrant because God the Spirit's authorial agency is to teach, guide, remind, and reveal the perfection of the Word that he has received from the Father and the Son. The Spirit testifies truthfully because he is the Spirit of truth (1 John 5:6). God the Spirit guarantees that God's Word is perfect through his efficacious speech. According to his mode of subsistence, as the one who proceeds from the Father and Son, his speech always perfectly corresponds to the Word that he receives from the Father and Son, ensuring his speech is flawless. He teaches and guides the church into all truth because he never speaks a Word that he has not heard from the Father and Son (John 16:14).

Frame notes, “There can be no errors in divine speech.”⁶ While this is true, a trinitarian account of inerrancy maintains that it is better to say that there can be no errors in *triune* speech. The Bible is inerrant because the triune God always speaks inerrantly. He has spoken a true Word that originates with the Father, is about and mediated by the Son, and is taught by the Spirit. Since the Bible is a Word spoken truthfully by the Trinity we can always expect to find truth, and only truth, contained in Scripture. The Father is trustworthy. The Son is trustworthy. The Spirit is trustworthy. The triune God is the God of truth and his Word perfectly corresponds to all of reality.

Sufficiency

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture lies at the core of the Protestant tradition.⁷ Through his prophets and apostles, God has revealed “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pt 1:3). Therefore, God’s Word is “profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is the doctrinal idea that God’s revelation of himself, the way of salvation, and instructions for a life of faith and obedience are found in the Bible. Typically, the sufficiency of Scripture is distinguished between material sufficiency and formal sufficiency. The material sufficiency of Scripture contends that Scripture contains everything necessary to be known and responded to as it relates to salvation and the Christian life. The formal sufficiency of Scripture asserts that since the Bible is God’s Word it is not subject to a foreign external authority, but that the Bible itself is legitimately self-interpreting. At the heart of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is the theological premise that God is knowable through Scripture.⁸

⁶John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 4, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 169.

⁷Cf. Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸See Timothy Ward, “Sufficiency of Scripture,” ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary for*

The traditional account of biblical sufficiency can be strengthened through an appeal to trinitarian communicative activity. A trinitarian account of biblical sufficiency suggests that the Bible is sufficient because the authorial agency of the Father in Scripture is to reveal to his people all that is necessary for faith and godliness. As the unbegotten Father, he never speaks an incomplete Word, and as a good Father, he does not exclude any necessary revelation as he makes himself known.

Furthermore, the Bible is sufficient because Christ is the fundamental content of the Father's speech in Scripture. Knowledge of Christ is sufficient because as we know Christ we come to know the Father and the Spirit. Therefore, the Bible is sufficient because as the mediator of the Father's Word, Christ facilitates the Father's speech to all those whom the Father has given to him. It is through the mediatorial communicative activity of the Son that the church experiences sufficient knowledge and communion with the triune God sufficient. There is no knowledge of Christ apart from Scripture, no fellowship with him except by fellowship in the word of the apostles.⁹ Thus, the Word that Christ speaks is sufficient and necessary because he mediates the Father's Word about himself.

Additionally, the Bible is sufficient because the Spirit efficaciously reveals and applies the Word to the people of faith. The Spirit's authorial agency in Scripture is to faithfully teach and administer the Father and Son's speech. The Spirit does not seek to supplement revelation, or to go beyond what is revealed in Scripture, but his mode of operations is to reveal the Word. The Spirit accomplishes his communicative work by revealing the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-13) and illuminating divine revelation (1 Corinthians 2:14-16) so that God's people have the mind of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of

Theological Interpretation of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

⁹Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 472.

the sufficiency of Scripture, then, is grounded on the assurance that the Spirit has completely accomplished his task of administering the Word of the Father and Son because he faithfully speaks everything he receives from the Father and the Son.

Scripture, therefore, is sufficient because it is the testimony of the Father, Son, and Spirit, none of which must be amended, added to, or excluded. A trinitarian account of biblical sufficiency maintains that God adequately ministers to his people through Scripture. Scripture is enough because it is what God intends to teach.¹⁰ Arguing for the sufficiency of Scripture, Bavinck contends,

In the Scriptures God daily comes to his people, not from afar but nearby. In it he reveals himself, from day to day, to believers in the fullness of his truth and grace. Through it he works his miracles of compassion and faithfulness. Scripture is the ongoing rapport between heaven and earth, between Christ and his church, between God and his children. It does not just tie us to the past; it binds us to the living Lord in the heavens. It is the living voice of God.¹¹

A trinitarian account of the sufficiency of Scripture provides the church with a doctrinal framework for proclaiming that the Word of the Father, Son, and Spirit suffices in shedding abroad knowledge of God, self, and salvation.

Perspicuity

Scripture teaches that “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” 1 John 1:5).¹² Therefore, God’s Word is clear. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:7) claims, “Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” Bavinck comments of the perspicuity of

¹⁰J. B. Webster, *The Domain of the Word* (New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 18.

¹¹Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:385.

¹²For an account of the history and theology of the perspicuity of Scripture see Gregg R. Allison, “The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Teaching” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995).

Scripture:

the knowledge of which is necessary to everyone for salvation, though not spelled out with equal clarity on every page of Scripture, is nevertheless presented throughout all of Scripture in such a simple and intelligible form that a person concerned about the salvation of his or her soul can easily, by reading and study, learn to know that truth from Scripture without the assistance and guidance of the church and the priest.¹³

The clarity of Scripture refers to the fact that Scripture so clearly reveals the central truths of Christianity and the gospel that the regenerate mind can, under the teaching and guidance of the Spirit, receive and understand revelation.¹⁴ Swain notes, God's communicative activity is "revelation, not a riddle."¹⁵

The traditional account of the Bible's perspicuity can be fortified through an appeal to trinitarian communicative activity because the Father, Son, and Spirit, each according to their mode of subsistence, speak a clear Word. A trinitarian account of perspicuity maintains that the Bible is perspicuous because, in Scripture, God the Father speaks an intelligible, comprehensible, and understandable Word. The Word that the Father speaks in the incarnation is comprehensible and the same is true about the Word that the Father speaks in inscripturation (Hebrews 1). The Father's purpose in speaking is to reveal, not confuse, so he speaks a clear Word.

The authorial work of the Son also has implications for an account of the perspicuity of Scripture. The Bible is perspicuous because the formal content of all of Scripture is the Son. Additionally, the Bible is clear because the Son mediates the Word with clarity, just as the Father speaks it. Jesus declares to the world what he has heard from the Father (John 8:26). The Son in the incarnation is, as the Word of God, the Father's ultimate and clear revelation. The Bible, the written Word of God, shares in that

¹³Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:477.

¹⁴Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 87.

¹⁵Ibid.

clarity, since our only access to God's revelation in Christ is through the Scriptures.¹⁶ Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27) and through it he continues to speak with clarity. Therefore, the clarity of Scripture has a distinctly Christological focus. Luther notes that to fail to see the Christological focus of the perspicuity of Scripture is to "take Christ from the Scripture."¹⁷ The Son's authorial agency is to speak clearly the Word about himself that he has received from his Father.

The Bible is perspicuous because the Spirit effectually and clearly speaks in Scripture to those who have received the Spirit. Luther rightly argued, "The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth."¹⁸ Scripture is clear because the Spirit, speaking the Word of Christ, leads readers into knowledge of Christ, who is the perfect image of the Father. What he speaks is clear because his authorial and interpretive role is to only speak the Word that he has received from the Father and Son. His authorial Work is to teach and illumine the clear Word that he hears the Father and Son speak.

Therefore, the doctrine of perspicuity, as it relates to triune communicative activity, ensures that its content and meaning is accessible and comprehensible to all who read it in faith. The Bible is perspicuous because God the Father speaks a clear Word, which is about and mediated through the Son, and taught by the Spirit.

God's trinitarian communicative activity, then, has implications for all doctrines related to bibliology, though all are not discussed here. Any doctrine of revelation does well to consider the authorial agency of the Father, Son, and Spirit, because as God, each speak with the authority of God, and also communicate in accordance with their mode of subsistence.

¹⁶Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 117.

¹⁷Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and Olaf Raymond Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 71.

¹⁸Martin Luther, *Reply to the Answer of the Leipzig Goat*, vol. 3, Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Holman, 1930), 350.

Pastoral Implications

The work of this dissertation would not be complete if it did not give some consideration to the pastoral implications of the thesis. If the Bible is authoritative because it is the trinitarian God's Word, how does that impact the life of the church? The church is characterized as being centered on and formed by the Word. Scripture, then, is authoritative for all the activities of the church. The three primary ways that the church is confronted with God's authoritative Word is in Scripture read, Scripture heard, and Scripture preached. It is in these churchly functions that the church rightly understands the Bible as authoritative.

A trinitarian account of biblical authority is pastoral because it refocuses the church's thought and worship on God. All authority belongs to the God who has revealed and redeemed precisely as Father, Son, and Spirit. Therefore, as the church thinks about the Bible as the triune God's Word that it reads, hears, and preaches, the church is brought into deeper fellowship with the God who saves.

Scripture Read

One of the ways Christians acknowledge the triune God's authoritative Word is through the act of reading the Bible. Christians acknowledge the authoritative Word as they place themselves under the Word through the submissive act of reading, not to critique the text, but to learn and be transformed by the triune God through the text. Reading is, therefore, seen as the process of learning *content* and participating in *communion* – both of which are required to grow in wisdom.¹⁹

A trinitarian framework of biblical authority impacts the way the Bible is read because it is read for content and communion. In the Bible God presents himself, and his

¹⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Love's Wisdom: The Authority of Scripture's Form and Content for Faith's Understanding and Theological Judgment," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 3 (January, 2011): 247–75. Vanhoozer argues that the Bible contains revealed information (propositions), but also large-scale patterns of information (poetry, narrative, etc.) that assist the reader to make proper theological judgments.

acts of redemption, in history for the reader to learn. Readers of Scripture are confronted with truth and propositions that perfectly correspond with reality. Readers are, therefore, confronted with the content of redemptive history for the purpose of growing in understanding and wisdom. Readers gain knowledge because in Scripture, God interprets reality for us. God the Father, Son, and Spirit lead readers into truth (John 16:3).

Additionally, the Bible is read for communion because it envisions its readers as entering into fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit through the act of reading. To read the Bible is to read the Word of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Reading and meditating on Scripture is a means of participating in an act of communion with the triune God, who is, through the Spirit, present with the reader in the biblical text.²⁰ It is not enough to have a high view of Scripture, unless the high view of Scripture leads to a formative reading. Therefore, reading is a means of transformational fellowship with the triune God.

“Scripture, when read, should be thought of as God preaching — God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the giver of Scripture; God the Son is the theme of Scripture; and God the Spirit is the Father’s appointed agent in witnessing to the Son, as the author, authenticator, and interpreter of Scripture,” argues Packer.²¹ It is the triune God who has spoken authoritatively, and in Scripture, it is the triune God to whom we are listening. God speaks in Scripture the church listens.

The Spirit produces readers, who read the Word in faith.²² Christian readers,

²⁰John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 34. Davis further argues, “When we meditate on the Scriptures in faith, we can actually experience the real presence of the triune God, who is present to us through the Word and by the Spirit. In meditation we can experience real-time communion with God, our loving heavenly Father, the Father who welcomes and joyfully embraces the returning prodigal son (Lk. 15:20). We can experience communion with Jesus, the eternally beloved Son of our Father, who experience joy in being loved by the Father. We can experience communion with the Holy Spirit who pours the love of the Father for the Son and for us into our hearts” (Ibid., 68).

²¹J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 91.

²²Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 27.

therefore, are the kind of readers that are addressed by God through the text. The fellowship that is extended through reading necessitates the kind of readers who demonstrate the virtues of submission, humility, love, receptivity, truthfulness, charity and imagination. Webster argues, “Engaging in the particular activity of reading Holy Scripture as the Word of God requires that I be a particular kind of person, one who through the Spirit is liberated from self-concern and the pursuit of self-defined interests, and formed both to love and seek for the ends which God establishes for human life.”²³ Christian reading allows one to begin the process of unlearning the customs of the world and acquiring how to shape one’s being according to Christ by the power of the Spirit. “To read well is to be given understanding of the divine precepts, to meditate on the works of God, to be separated by falsehood and taught by divine grace,” reasons Webster.²⁴ Christian readers, then, read with a posture of teachability and humility, trusting that as they read, God will teach. In the process of reading, Christian interpreters are confronted with reality, as interpreted by God, and are extended fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit that leads them into all wisdom.

Scripture Heard

God’s Word engages, not just the eye that reads, but the ear that hears. Christians acknowledge the Bible as the authoritative Word of the triune God through the hearing of Scripture. Throughout Scripture, God addresses his people authoritatively by having the Scripture read audibly in the community (Neh 8:7-8; 2 Chron 34:18-19, 30). Paul exhorts Timothy, a young pastor, to devote himself and the church to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13). In the public reading of Scripture, “The people are being recalled to their God; their identity as the people of the covenant is being restated,

²³J. B. Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 83.

²⁴Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 28.

redefined for a new generation.”²⁵ God’s authoritative Word functions in the community as the Word that identifies, forms, and shapes the community. A trinitarian formulation of revelation regards the public reading of Scripture as an address from God the Father, through the mouth of the Son, by the power of the Spirit, to the church. It is God’s speech to God’s people. The people of God, in the public reading of Scripture, are addressed by God and are given an identity, as they are created, molded, and defined by God’s speech.²⁶ Therefore, the Bible must be given its rightful place in the life of the church.

As God addresses the church through the public reading of his Word, the community receives its identity from God the speaker. Therefore, the church is characterized by faithful hearing and listening. Webster notes, “The definitive act of the church is faithful hearing of the gospel of salvation announced by the risen Christ in the Spirit’s power through the service of the Holy Scripture. As the creature of the divine Word, the church is the hearing church.”²⁷ The church that listens to Scripture read, then, does not approach the text in order to use it for its own purposes, but to listen and hear from God.²⁸ In listening and hearing the church is reoriented to the triune God.

One of the great dangers in doing theology is the desire to do all the talking. The Christian theological framework begins with the speech of God.²⁹ Since God has spoken, we must listen. As Scripture is read publicly, Christians confess that the triune

²⁵Philip H. Towner, “The Function of the Public Reading of Scripture in 1 Timothy 4:13 and in Biblical Tradition,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 44 (Fall 2003): 50.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 51.

²⁷J. B. Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

²⁸Packer argues, “To hear, in its full biblical sense, implies attention, assent, and application of oneself of the things learned; it means listening with a firm purpose to obey and doing as God’s word proves to require” (Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 119).

²⁹Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 62.

God is a communicative agent and that the Bible is his authoritative, governing, Word. Therefore, Christian theology is an enterprise of hearing and listening.

As the church reads and listens to Scripture, it returns to the divine speaker, and thereby listens to the speech of the Father, spoken by and through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. To hear the text is to hear the Word of the Lord. In hearing Scripture, the church remembers and recognizes that God graciously initiates his salvific and revelatory purposes.

Scripture Preached

Not only are Christians confronted with God's authoritative Word in the reading and hearing of Scripture, but also in the preaching of the Word. Webster argues, "Preaching is commissioned human speech in which God makes his appeal. . . . the church preaches because it is a reading and hearing community."³⁰ The church is called to "preach the Word . . . in season and out of season" (2 Tim 1:13-14). Paul also argues that the Word that the apostles preach is the very Word of God when he argues, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). Preaching, therefore, is directly connected to the authoritative Word of God.

A trinitarian conception of encountering God's authoritative Word also has implications for the preaching of God's Word. In proclamation the words of the pastor function as the medium of trinitarian communicative activity: God the Father addresses his church, through the proclamation of the person and work of the Son, by the power of the Spirit. In the act of preaching the church confesses "the trustworthiness of Scripture,

³⁰Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 26. Webster continues, "Preaching is the public reiteration of the divine Word as it articulates itself in the words of the prophets and apostles, and by it the Holy Spirit forms the church."

which enables us to abandon ourselves in complete trust to its authority and to preach its message.”³¹ The preached Word is, therefore, authoritative.

The Reformation tradition went to great lengths to re-center the church on the proclamation of God’s Word.³² Martin Luther argued, “To preach Christ is to feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it, if it believes the preaching. For faith alone and the efficacious Word of God bring salvation.”³³ For Calvin, “Every time the Gospel is preached, it is as if God himself came in person solemnly to summon us.”³⁴ The Reformation tradition emphasized the ministry of the Word because it understood that in preaching God is addressing his people. The church that preaches the Word in an expository fashion imitates the communicative activity of the preaching God.

Trinitarian communicative action, therefore, is central to a theology of preaching because it develops the relationship that exists between the authoritative Scripture, authoritative preaching, and God’s communicative activity. Preaching the authoritative Word is a means of God speaking and acting, through the body of Christ, to the Spirit indwelt church. Packer argues, “A true sermon is an act of God, and not a mere performance by man. In real preaching the speaker is the servant of the Word and God speaks and works by the Word through his servant’s lips.”³⁵ If God is speaking it must be the Father’s discourse, which is about the Son and mediated by the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. In preaching, the church testifies about God’s authoritative work and Word by serving as a faithful witness through which God himself acts.

³¹G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 138.

³²Heiko Oberman contends, “The genius of the Reformation is best described as the rediscovery of the Holy Spirit. . . . The Reformation returned to an understanding of the Holy Spirit as the dynamic presence of God in Jesus Christ . . . under the veil of the preached word” (ss quoted in William Childs Robinson, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], 119).

³³Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 12.

³⁴John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1974), 3.

³⁵J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 180.

Conclusion

“Audacious, but common is the attribution of speech to God,” notes Nicholas Wolterstorff.³⁶ While it is certainly audacious to attribute speech to God, it is more audacious to claim that the Bible is his authoritative Word. However, if God has spoken, his Word is necessarily authoritative. His Word does not simply carry a functional authority, but it is as authoritative as God himself. Augustine makes a similar point, “Let us treat scripture like scripture, like God speaking.”³⁷

The authority of Scripture is absolutely central to Christian faith. Augustine notes, “Faith will start tottering if the authority of scripture is undermined; then with faith tottering, charity itself begins to sicken.”³⁸ In an age of increasing secularism, the church is faced, once again, with giving an account for authority. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones contends, “We either accept the authority of the Bible, or we accept the authority of modern knowledge, modern science, human understanding, and human ability. It is one or the other. . . . It is Christ, or the critics.”³⁹ Therefore, the church must continually contend for biblical authority, specifically the trinitarian nature of biblical authority. The Christian character of truth can be asserted solely because it is rooted in Holy Scripture – the location where the triune God extends metaphysical and epistemological grace.

Christian Scripture attributes all authority to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Wainwright is correct note, “The Christian faith is inalienably trinitarian.”⁴⁰ Since this is true, it must also be true that any doctrine of Christian

³⁶Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

³⁷Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, ed. Daniel Doyle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007), 176.

³⁸Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 124.

³⁹David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 60.

⁴⁰Geoffrey Wainwright, “Trinity,” ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 815.

revelation must also be necessarily trinitarian. Therefore, a theological account of biblical authority must consider the authoritative authorial agency of each person of the Trinity.

“The ultimate authority for Christian theology is the triune God speak-acting in the Scriptures,” notes Vanhoozer.⁴¹ His speech brings things into being, and it is by the living Word that all things are being restored to their being. The authority of the Bible is best articulated within the context of triune communicative activity, as Webster argues:

When God’s action towards the world is conceived in a non-Trinitarian fashion, and, in particular, when Christian talk of the presence of the risen Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit does not inform conceptions of divine action in the world, then that action comes to be understood as external, interruptive, and bearing no real relations to creaturely realities. God, in effect, becomes causal will, intervening in creaturely reality from outside but unconnected to the creation. This frankly dualistic framework can only be broken by replacing the monistic and monergistic idea of divine causality with an understanding of God’s continuing free presence and relation to the creation through the risen Son in the Spirit’s power.⁴²

Arguing for biblical authority, Calvin is right to point out that, “our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is.” Though Calvin is pointing primarily to God’s attributes as he refers to God’s character, this premise can be applied to trinitarian communicative activity because him whose Word it is, is the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.⁴³

A trinitarian account of biblical authority trusts that the triune God has, is, and will continue to speak authoritative truth, to all of creation, in Scripture. The Bible is authoritative because it heralds the commanding presence of the triune author.⁴⁴ Since the

⁴¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 67.

⁴²Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 21.

⁴³John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1:32.

⁴⁴Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 19.

authority of Scripture coincides with the authority of the triune God, it is essentially an absolute authority.

Evangelical theology prizes Scripture as the special revelation of the only God there is.⁴⁵ Its doctrine of revelation must be anchored firmly in the self-presentation of the triune God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are each pivotally involved in the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Ultimately, authority, the right to rule, belongs to the trinitarian God, and Christianity is ultimately a matter of bowing to his authority through obedient response to his revelation. God's authority is not one of coercion, but is exercised with intelligibility and accommodation. It is an authoritative plea that moves towards reconciliation with the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. In heralding the Scripture's authority, the authoritative Word of the triune God, the church acknowledges the Father of infinite grandeur, his true and only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ The Bible, though it is not the only resource for theology, is the supreme and authoritative source because it is the one voice of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁵Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 23.

⁴⁶Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 19.

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ABSTRACT

THUS SAYS THE LORD: A TRINITARIAN ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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One of the most important distinguishing marks of the Christian faith is that it is a revealed religion. The Christian faith professes that God has graciously and with authority revealed himself to his creatures. Therefore, the doctrine of Scripture, specifically biblical, is an issue of central importance in any theological formulation that is distinctly Christian. Despite the centrality of biblical authority in the system of Christian faith, there is perhaps no other doctrine under greater reproach.

In light of the increased criticism of the doctrine of Scripture, Christians have adopted various theologies of revelation in order to explain what the biblical text is, how it relates to God, and how it functions authoritatively. And yet many of these proposals fail to take advantage of the resources provided by the communicative categories of the rich Christian trinitarian tradition. Specifically, very few evangelical proposals related to biblical authority consider how the specific modes of subsistence related God the Father (unbegottenness), God the Son (eternal begottenness), and God the Holy Spirit (procession) contribute to a Christian understanding of divine authorship.

This dissertation is an exercise in dogmatic and exegetical theology that gives an account of the relationship between biblical authority and trinitarian communicative activity. This dissertation will argue that the Bible is authoritative because it has God the Father as its source, God the Son as the content and mediator of the Father's speech, and God the Spirit as the efficacious power who speaks the Word that he receives from the

Father and Son. Therefore, Scripture is authoritative because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit all speak, with one voice, an authoritative Word.

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