

THE WORD OF GOD AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

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Today the center of theological debate centers around the nature of the Word of God and questions of hermeneutics. The issues are involved and of immense consequence. In this paper I would only briefly call attention to a number of matters which require immediate and urgent discussions are to enhance, rather than further confuse, the people of God in their witness to the jumbled world of the seventies.

1. For those who have been touched by God's Spirit, the Bible is the book of life; it is the Word of God. As the Scriptures confess, all flesh is grass and its beauty like a wild flower. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God remains forever. It is on the Word of God that we can rest and find rootage. It is the Scriptures which set forth the Canon or rule for life in order that mankind, lost in sin, may once again discover certainty. It points the way to the certainty of faith. The Bible reveals the way of certainty that we are to walk. As the Word of the Author of Life, the Bible is the authority for life.

In confessing that the Scriptures are for us the book of certainty, we are simply stating what the Scriptures teach us in II Tim. 3:16 (Philips translation):

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The Scriptures are the comprehensive equipment for the man of God and fit him fully for all branches of work.

At this beginning point we can only appeal to the Scriptures. We cannot appeal to reason in a rationalistic or neo-rationalistic way, nor to religious consciousness à la Schleiermacher, nor to some irrationalist depth dimension, nor to the results of the historical-critical method in its nineteenth or twentieth century forms.

Our appeal to the Scriptures takes the form of confession. We confess that it is in the Scriptures that we come to know Christ. We believe in Christ according to the Scriptures. In faith we bow before the Scriptures as the Word of God. That we cannot go behind or beyond the Scriptures to test their authority as the Word of God is no problem. If there was some higher authority by which to corroborate the Scriptures, the Scriptures would not be the Word or Canon for the new creation, the first and last Word. At the outset of human action, including theological activity, a man must confess in what he puts his first [p.2>] and final trust, he must choose whether he will live by the Word or some pseudo-word.

The importance of this matter cannot be exaggerated. It means that study of the Scriptures is only Biblical after one has been gripped by the Word of God itself. Theoretically, it means that study of the composition, language, internal structure of the Scriptures, how and when the books were declared canonic, may not and cannot affect the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. The Scriptures have authority—because their Author is He who in his Spirit through Christ has revealed it to us.

What I have said so far may sound simple, too simple, especially to theologians. But the fact is that for the believer, his submission to the Scriptures as the Word of God is total, integral and in this sense simple—but far from simplistic. How one is to later develop theologically a doctrine of Scripture is a different and secondary matter, a

matter which itself must be executed in accord with the Word as norm. This simple matter is highly important because it is often forgotten in modern theological debate. The question of canonicity cannot—I repeat: cannot—be settled by any scientific discipline even if it is theology. One can only come to a Biblical doctrine of Scripture when he has already submitted himself to the Scriptures as Canon.

2. However, there is still more that needs discussion. Granted the need to distinguish submission to Scriptures as Word from a theological formulation of a doctrine of the Scriptures, one would nevertheless still expect that all Christians would by and large agree to the doctrinal formulations in regard to Scripture. But they simply do not. Why not? How can it be explained?

When a man submits to the Scriptures or the Word in Christ, he is gripped in his heart by the Spirit. As a whole man he immediately begins to live out his new life by producing fruits of the Spirit. Heart-committed to Christ he must in every bodily way work out that commitment.

Confession of his Lord and Savior is one of the obvious first fruits. Since it subsequently acts as the integrating (or disintegrating) motive in a person's life, this confession will at the same time, no matter how embryonically, be developed into a world or confessional vision. One formulates for himself his certain beliefs concerning God, man, creation, task, Kingdom. The vision adopted leads a person in all his activities, including his theologizing. But since such articulations are human work they are fallible and liable to error. Often the power of unbiblical motives is so strong that even the first beginnings of working out a world-view or elaborating a world-vision are torpedoed and undermined. In spite of being touched in the heart by the Word it is therefore possible that one can develop or pass on a vision of life, a world view, which is basically at odds with the genius of the Gospel. [p.3>]

For the subject at hand this means that insofar one does not formulate a world view according to the Scriptures, insofar the Scriptural message, in itself clear, is obscured, blocked and impaired in one's theological doctrine or Scripture.

Thus it is extremely naive for Christians to believe, as so many of us seem to, that once Scriptural authority has been asserted, one arrives very quickly at a true doctrine of Scripture and true interpretation of Scripture. Everyone is led in his explanation of scriptural authority as well as in his exegesis by his vision of what reality is.

Thus in order to deal with the complexity of the human situation it is necessary to distinguish, although not to separate, the gracious grip which the Word of God in the Spirit has in the heart of a believer's stumbling or articulate, but always fallible confession of the gripping and theoretically developed doctrine which sets out to structurally explain the meaning of the confession. Once these distinctions are accepted, we can begin to understand the otherwise mystifying situation that not all those rooted in Christ work out, either confessionally or theoretically, their salvation in the same way.

At the same time we are warned against and prohibited from elevating either our confessions or our theological work to the level of infallibility.

We cannot ignore the fact that our confessions and our theoretically formulated doctrines are *our* confessions and *our* doctrines. They are not to be identified with *the* Word of God, even though we hope, trust and work so that they are obedient responses to and in that way reformulations of the Word of God. But the process of

deepening our confessions and sharpening our formulations will always be with us until the end.

3 Although what has been said so far neither permits us to identify our view of Scriptural authority with the Scriptural authority itself, nor gives us the freedom to make that authority problematic, it has become exceedingly clear that a deficient view of Scriptural authority obscures the working out of this authority in our lives. On the other hand, an understanding of the structure, pattern and range of Biblical authority which faithfully reflects this authority will greatly facilitate obedient life before the face of the Lord.

Our views of Scriptural authority must reflect the nature of Scripture and enable us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That is, our views must help us more and more to understand how the Scriptures are the “comprehensive equipment for the man of God and fit him fully for all branches of work”. Insofar as our views stand in the way of such growth, they need to be reworked.

It is at this point, I feel that the problems become acute. It is my judgment that the Christian Church has not made sufficiently clear to the present generation how it conceives the Bible to be the book of certainty for life.

Briefly, it appears to me that two lines of approach, dialectically dependent even in their opposition, have developed which have immeasurably contributed to the deteriorated state of affairs.

One broad spectrum of opinion (the “conservative” wing), fearful (wrongly) that any discussion of the nature of Biblical authority is in effect an attack on its authority. If anything more is said, there is a tendency to play up the divine character of the Scripture and romanticize or compromise its creatureliness. Ironically, there are also often efforts to “prove” from extra-Biblical sources that the Bible is true and trustworthy.

Another wide spectrum of thought (the “liberal” wing), succumbing (again wrongly) to the suspicion that problems in working out Biblical authority in effect make that authority problematic, has generally retreated from the confession that the Bible is the Word of God. Although a veritable deluge of historical-critical studies has pointed to weaknesses in traditional concepts of Biblical authority, the underlying commitment to the problematic character of the Scriptures as God’s Word effectively negates the basic conclusions drawn. Overwhelmed by the creatureliness of the Scripture, this brand of thought is unable to do justice to [the] God-breathed character of Scripture.

In this situation, I take it, being Reformed means to go a “third way.” The *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation was a clear affirmation of the authority of the Scriptures. At the same time the Reformed tradition attempted to expound a doctrine of Scripture in which neither the creatureliness nor the divinity of Scripture was slighted or threatened. That is not to say that in practice Reformed thinkers have always been able to work out such a third way. Unfortunately too often that has not been the case. In Europe thinkers, especially in England and Holland, in America thinkers, especially at Princeton and Westminster seminaries have persisted in the search for a “third way.”

Certainly the necessity of the continued development of a third way, a way which is neither “conservative” nor “liberal,” is real. How the full authority of the Scripture, rightly confessed, is to function in all of life is still vague and unclear. The rediscovery of the Word of God in the Reformation has not yet been sufficiently worked out.

The very fact that there is no living Biblical witness in most of the arenas of modern life speaks volumes. A Biblical way of living and working is still strange to us too often in spite of the Biblical promise that the Scriptures outfit a person for such a life.

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4. At present Reformed thinkers are still not of one mind as the contours of a Reformed or Biblical doctrine of Scriptural authority. In this context the recent thesis introduced by Meredith Kline in his *The Structure of Biblical Authority* is worthy of serious consideration. The report on the *Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority* adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1972 is also a substantial contribution to the discussion.

Agreeing that the Bible is not a compendium of all possible knowledge, nor a textbook for science, most Reformed thinkers today are moving in the direction of declaring the Scriptures to possess full authority in what they intend to teach.

But what do they intend to teach and how do they intend to teach it? What is the structure, pattern and range of such teaching?

Obviously, the Script are for the salvation and redemption of mankind in Jesus Christ. In that they are infallible. But obviously more be said to do justice to Christ's universal kingship and cosmic redemption. Certainly creation must be involved in the reconciliation effected [*sic* – GW] by Christ. In fact, everything in heaven and earth, including every thought, scientific or otherwise, is to be captive to Jesus Christ. But if this is the case, the question returns. Granting that the Scriptures have a redemptive (or judgmental) intention, and granting that the Scriptures are not handbooks for this and that, how are we to spell out and work out their authority for morality, culture, science—in brief for life?

The answers we hear, ranging between virtually considering the Bible a text book for science and culture and considering Biblical motives not irrelevant for science and culture, are still unclear and certainly not always in agreement.

5. The major difficulty in making more or progress is working out the admittedly very difficult problems which lies in my opinion in the fact that Reformed thinking has too often operated with a dualistic world-views which does not allow the unity of God, of his Word and of the creation as well as recreation to come sufficiently to the fore.

In concert with “liberal” and “conservative” we have begun to read the Scriptures with two-realm glasses or world-views. Depending on the details involved the realms receive various names: nature-supernature, nature-grace, natural-spiritual, reason-faith, history-kingdom of God, creation-redemption, body-soul, *coram hominibus-coram deo*, outer-inner, man as man-man as Christian, state-church, love of neighbor-love of God, and more particularly in Reformed circles, creation-redemption, nature-revelation, general revelation-special revelation, common grace-special grace, man as creature-man in covenant, covenant of works-covenant of grace, creature-creator. If one puts on such two-realm glasses—glasses of his own making I remind you—he thinks he finds two [p.6>] realms in creation and subsequently interprets Scripture in the same way. In such readings the Scripture is automatically placed as special revelation in the grace realm and set in tension with nature or creation.

But once having divided life, we can never really enjoy the integrality of life in faith. The irony is as tragic as it is sad: for by first separating in one's world view the salvation of souls from renewal of culture, the realm of grace and the Scriptures from

the rest of creation, one will then have to go to all ends, often involving dialectical handspings and all, to make the Scripture speak to culture, to make the Scriptures relevant for life. But once you have separated the Scriptures from life, the seamless unity can never be recovered whether by moral examples, logically deduced truths or whatsoever.

It is these two-realm bifocals (whatever the particulars) and the dualism which is read into creation which I think frustrates our efforts to further develop a view of Biblical authority. I also think this is the crux of the problem in our discussion with Westminster. Both professors Frame and Shepherd appear to be working in and out of types of two-realm views.

For the sake of our discussion, before articulating my own view, let me briefly sketch how I visualize their world views. Neither time nor space permits me at this point to indicate how their world views lead them to criticize our position the way they do.

6. In his paper *The Bible as the Word of God*, Shepherd works with the categories nature and revelation, subdividing the latter into general and special revelation. The picture I get is this: There is “nature itself” (p. 4), or “brute facts of nature” (p. 8), which has to do with motion, language, economics, aesthetics, in brief, “natural verities” (p. 11) but not with the revelation of the Word of God. Shepherd also repeatedly talks of “ordinary history” (pp. 25, 26, 40), “human history” (pp. 9, 12, 13, 16), over against “covenant history” (p. 20) as God’s direct acts in ordinary history). Then, “when creation is viewed from the perspective of revelation” (p. 6), the glory and divinity of God are *somehow* revealed in nature, although the *somehow* remains vague and mysterious. “Beyond that”, Shepherd posits a third level, “in his word God has made known his will for man” (p. 7).

This setup, I affirm, makes it impossible, all desires notwithstanding, to do justice to the Scriptural givens concerning the one God, the one Word and the one creation. Shepherd’s later mention of the unity of revelation (pp. 8, 10) still does not include the foundational non-revelational level of nature. If the Word is “beyond” both nature itself and nature in its revelatory dimensions, is it not thereby impossible to do justice to the Scriptural confession of 2 Peter 3:5 that by the Word of God the heavens and earth were made and are still upheld today? [p.7>]

It is his idea of the possibility of considering nature itself apart from nature in its revelatory dimension which leads to the affirmation that: “The creation is not a revelation of the mechanics of motion, or of the principles of a sound economic system, or of aesthetic norms. It is the revelation of God” (p.6).

How, in such a framework, can we do justice to the fact that God made and continues to make movement, buying and selling, art, etc. possible by sending forth his let-there-be words? If one, in the manner of shepherd’s distinction between nature itself and nature in its revelatory dimension, refuses to acknowledge that these words are the norms making life in all its diversity possible, even his confession that creation reveals God can have little or no content beyond the confession itself. This means, as indeed has so been the case, that such confession of general revelation does not in the least help in working out a Reformed world view. In such a setup in which the Word is virtually identified exclusively with the Bible, the psalmist’s confession (Ps. 148) that fire, hail, snow and wind obey the Word of God is not true on the level of nature, and only rhetorical use of language on the general revelational level.

Must we not rather say on the basis of such passages, to which Shepherd himself refers, that God created the world (“nature” if you will) by his Word, and that there is a word or law of God for fire, snow and plants, for animals, for marriage, etc.; words which can only be understood in their unity in Jesus Christ. Then we will not play off, as Shepherd does, revelation of aesthetic norms and revelation of God. Rather, in revealing the norms for aesthetics creation does not reveal something autonomous, or something of man’s own creation, but reveals (one dimension of) the Word of God. It is no wonder that he concludes “The Bible is not a guide to the unfolding of culture, but warns us to flee from the wrath of God to come, and to seek our refuge and strength in Jesus Christ.” Then no doubt, feeling the tension, Shepherd adds, “Only in Jesus Christ can culture develop to the glory of God.”

In his recent article in the *Presbyterian Guardian*, Professor Frame too is very clear on the basics of his view, “Everything is either creator or creature.” The question is whether such a view enables one to do justice to the Scriptural givens. To begin with, Frame admits that Christ is an exception; he is a mediator who is fully human and fully divine.

What about the Scriptures themselves? Are these either creator or creature? Although I am not aware that he has stated it in so many words, it would appear that Frame identifies the Scriptures with the Creator—God. On other hand, it appears obvious to me that the Scriptures as the Word of God which is also completely the word of man is another exception to his scheme.

And what about the law of God? Here Frame clearly identifies the law of God with God himself. However, is it correct to identify God’s law for, shall [p.8>] we say, marriage, ontically with God himself?

Further, don’t the Scriptures also testify that the Logos, the Word of God, is mediator of creation as well as redemption? “By him, through him, and unto him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, it is from such givens that we believe that it is necessary to begin with a view distinguishing God, His WORD and creation. The difficulties the creator-creature scheme impose on Frame come out even more starkly as we follow his discussion of the Word of God.

Although not without some trepidation, he identifies the Word of God with God himself. But, a moment later he defines “word” in a creaturely way as “linguistic communication.” Is God then to be defined as “linguistic communication”?

Here Frame appears, wisely it would seem, to demur. No God’s Word is God’s linguistic communication. Nevertheless *word* still retains its exclusive lingual meaning. But if creator and creature have language in common, doesn’t this similarity threaten or at least obscure the difference between God and man. And, as an interesting aside, if God’s word is to be read exclusively as God’s lingual communication what is to stop one from reading of God’s eyes, nostrils and arms in an exclusively physical way? Then creator and creature would have in common physical eyes, nostrils and arms, the difference being that God’s eyes are not man’s eyes. But that would leave us giving God a physical body?

My point in general is that a two-realm view (of any type) is unable to do justice to the Scriptural givens. Consequently a “mediator” always sneaks in somewhere, often dialectically, which never fitting in either of the two categories ends up endangering the whole distinction.

A general example of this problem is the very common conceptions of God's relation to the world in terms of a two-realm view. God, as creator, is transcendent. But he must also be in contact with creation, so he is immanent. How the transcendence and immanence relate remains vague and a matter of degree. Conservative theologians stress transcendence, liberal theologians stress immanence.

The difference is also bridged analogically. God has attributes, so does man. But, lest the similarity in sharing attributes become only one of degree, the distinction is made between incommunicable and communicable attributes. In other words, with only two categories, relationship is talked of in terms of similarity and there is always the minimizing of difference. The end result is that various theories develop, some of which stress the similarity (or even identity today) of creator and creature while others stress the difference [p.9>] (even some to the point of complete hostility).

In all this my point is that if we start with a two-realm view, it is extremely difficult, I believe impossible, to develop a view of Biblical authority which does justice to the Word of God as a lamp unto our feet.

Thus the difference between Professors Shepherd and Frame and myself is on this level of world-view (and philosophy), not thankfully on the confession of Biblical authority. As I have argued, everyone works out his confession of Biblical authority in terms of a view of life (which is or is not developed theoretically into a philosophy).

For our discussions to be fruitful they must center on these matters, we insist mutually investigate which world-view is most in line with the Biblical testimony, most conducive to developing a Biblical style of life,

7. In the space that remains in this paper, let me briefly indicate some of the basics of a position which offers some promise in helping the Reformed community make a unique Biblical witness in the world. The Scriptures reveal to us that it is the Written Word which in the Spirit opens our hearts to confess Christ and which opens our eyes to see the Word which structures, directs and upholds Creation on the way to the final fulfilment. The Scriptures themselves lead us to confess that the Word Written and the Word Incarnate are redemptive renewals of the Word which from the beginning structures, directs and upholds creation.

Listen to the Scriptural witness:

“By the Word of Yahweh the heavens were made, their whole array by the breath of his mouth... He spoke, and it was created, he commanded and there it stood” (Ps. 33:6-9). The Psalmist further testifies that “He gives an order; his word flashes to earth: to spread snow like a blanket, to strew hoarfrost like ashes, to drop ice like breadcrumbs, and when the cold is unbearable, he sends his word to bring the thaw and warm wind to melt the snow. He reveals his word to Jacob, his statutes and rulings to Israel” (Ps. 147:17-19). “Fire and hail, snow a mist, stormy winds fulfilling his word” (Ps. 148:8).

And the words of Peter are to the point: “They are choosing to forget that there were the heavens at the beginning, and that the earth was formed by the word of God out of water and between waters... But by the same word, the present sky and earth are destined for fire...” (2 Peter 3:5-7; cf. Hebrews 1:1-3; Ps. 119:89-96). And listen to Hebrews 11:3 “It is by faith that we understand that the world was created by one Word from God so that no apparent cause can account for the things we can see.”

The Scriptures demand that in our reflection we take account of the fact that the world was created by the Word of God. “And God said, let there be...and there was.” Any discussion of the Word may not be limited to the [p.10>] Scriptures, or even to Christ. God spoke and the world was formed. Nothing exists by itself. All things were created through the Word, and all things reconciled by God through the Word, and all things are upheld by the “word of his power” (Hebrews 1:1). God put his Word to the world and called creation into existence and the same Word holds it to this day in place in Jesus Christ in whom all things cohere (cf. Gen. 1, Job 38, John 1, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1). Without the word of the covenant, the world would simply pass away. And the Spirit of the Lord leads and moves the creation according to the direction of the Word to the eschaton which God will be all-in-all.

8. The Christian Church must recover the fullness and unity of the Word of God. The Word of God is one. But since man’s fall, that Word also comes to us Inscripturated and Incarnated. When mankind fell in Adam, it no longer heard and understood the Word. To make it possible again for man to hear and do the Word, and thus live, God gave the Scriptures to enlighten man as to his place, his nature and his task. Finally, in the “last days He has spoken to us in His Son” (Hebrews 1:1). The Word in its unity and in its diversity is the Power of God to life. That Word is “alive and active. It cuts more deeply than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4: 12).

There is the Word of God by which the heavens were created, and the same Word is Written and Incarnated. It is not that the Scriptures are *one* part of the Word of God and that there are also other parts. Rather, the Scriptures and Christ are peculiar, unique, redemptive concentrations of the Word of God from the beginning. The Word of God is in its unity, a coherent diversity. Many words of the Lord, “let there be’s” makeup the one Word. And man is to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, not only by the word for bread. The Word in its diversity as law-order structures, directs and upholds creation. And since the Lord is faithful and his words trustworthy, the words of God are the one Word. When one walks according to the Word of God, he walks in the Way of the Lord. And just as there are many words of God so there are many ways we must go in obedience. God’s Word(s) of Creation made possible the Way(s) of creation. In Christ, according to the Scriptures, man can again obey the words and walk in his ways.

9. The mystery of the Scriptures and of Christ and at the same time our joy and salvation is the fact that in the Scriptures and Christ the Word of God takes on the form of creaturely reality which itself is subject to the Word. The Word which holds for creation and by whom all things were created itself becomes flesh (John 1) for our redemption. That we cannot explain logically, we can only know as a gift of the Spirit. In this way the Scriptures and Christ are completely human (creaturely) and at the same time [p.11>] completely the Word (divine). In this way the Scriptures and Christ are “handles” by which a fallen creation can again see and obey the Word. The Word became flesh; it was Inscripturated and Incarnate for our salvation.

The Scriptures urge us to surrender our lives to the Lord and place before us the Direction of obedience. They unfold for mankind the vision of Christ’s Kingdom and the necessity of confessing his name to live in that Kingdom. The Scriptures lay the mainlines of a confessional vision which is to guide our day-to-day activities. They tell us who we are (God’s servants), where we are (in a creation in the grip of His Word), where we are going (in Christ to the final perfection of the already-dawning Kingdom) and what our task is (obedient gardeners, agents of the reconciliation). In

this way the Scriptures through Christ put us back in place so that we can again rightly hear, see and know the Word of God holding for creation. Gripped by this vision of the Kingdom and our task in it, mankind ought to begin to work out the meaning of this salvation in all of his activities with fear and trembling.

10. The Scriptures republish the Word in a creaturely fashion. Christ re-proclaims the Word in creaturely fashion. Because of our post-Fall situation mankind must *start* with the Scriptures and meet Christ before it can again have its eyes opened to the Word holding for the creation. But this priority of the Scriptures and Christ does not mean that we can stop with the Scriptures or Christ as redeemer. Both the Scriptures and Christ point us to the Word of God as that by which all things are kept in life. The Scriptures structurally add nothing to the Word of God; they republish, re-proclaim it in such a way that creation can be redirected along the ways God originally planned. Christ adds nothing to the Word of God structurally: He is the Word of God made flesh for the re-creation and redemption of the world.

Of course, as the book of redemption the Scriptures are the Book of New Life. Christ likewise is the fulfilment of the Word and the Word is fully revealed in Him.

We have to get away from thinking that the Scriptures are an additional word added to time creation in the sense of a new area, in the way, for example, another floor is added to a building. Rather, we should see the Scriptures in concentrated fashion republishing the Word by which the creation was called into being. There is no additional floor, or new realm added or rebuilt in redemption. Rather Christ according to the Scriptures transforms a darkened mansion into a mansion where the lights are on again. To change the figure: the relationship is more like a door in relationship to its knob. There is no need of a handle on the door as Word (before the Fall) and now there is need for such a knob (the Scriptures). [p.12>]

This means that the Scriptures can never be conceived in themselves. Apart from the task of recreation and redemption, so that the original Word(s) will not fail, but live in stand for forever. The Inscripturated and Incarnated Word is the same word, which created and sustains creation until this day.

At this point, to matters deserve attention before we move on.

The word should not be conceived of as the substance of one sort or another.

- It is the address of God claiming man and creation.
- It is the appeal of God for man and creation.
- It is the directive of God to man and creation.
- It is condition of God for man in creation.

The word is for life and to life. God called the creation into being by His word so that it could covenant with him. After the Fall God reclaims the creation again by the Word so that the covenant can be restored. In God's redemption of creation and man he provides his word in creaturely lingual form so that we might taste, see and feel the goodness of God and again know the Word by which we must live.

It must also be noted that the Word of God cannot be reduced to the words for analytic and lingual activity. Much less can the Word be reduced to lingual words or logical thoughts. This is important because in the history of theology, in both 'conservative' and 'liberal' thinking one discovers a conscious or unconscious, a subtle or bold, a careless or careful, but in any event, a real shift back and forth from

(divine) Word to (human) words and words to Word as if there are no distinctions to be made. Consequently the conservatives emphasising the divine are not able structurally—their intention to the contrary—to really do justice to the creatureliness of the words. And the liberals, emphasizing the human, are structurally unable—again perhaps despite their desires—to really take seriously the divine character of the Scriptures. Scripture tells us clearly that God ordered, structured and continues to uphold the creation by his Word. But the order of the Word in the diversity of words is *not* an order of reason. Any such notion or notions contradicts the Biblical witness. Reality is indeed ordered, but order is not synonymous with rational, or logical, or lingual. The word from analysis is only one of the words of creation, and therefore, logical order is only one of the kinds of order which are present in creation. The fixed order of the seasons, the regular day-night rhythm, the rise and fall of tides are, for example, not logical in nature, although all of this phenomena to have a logical side to them; they are knowable and we can make concepts of them. Neither are the love relationships between husband and wives, and parents and children, basically logical. They are certainly ordered, however, and that by the word truth. There is also word for language and [p.13>]thus a lingual side to creation. In fact it is because of these sides that we are unable to logically distinguish in the able to put in words what we distinguish. However, the Word as a whole is more than its words. It is the Power of God unto salvation, which is more than lingual. Thus insight into the Word of God is the basic motive of creation is not a matter of reasonableness or rationality or linguistic insight. It is a matter of the heart. Rooted-in-the-heart-surrender to the Father in Jesus Christ through the Spirit means that one knows the Word in a central way as the law unto life. Analytic-lingual concerns certainly enter in, as do emotional, physical, ethical and social matters. But in its unity and in to grow at the knowledge of the word is a matter of the heart. The idea that knowledge and truth are basically logical; that order, law, objectivity are synonymous with logicity, analyticity, and rationality is a long-standing tradition which finds its roots in pagan, rather than in Christians thought. The Word of God is not essentially logical in nature and thus it cannot be transformed exhaustively into the premises of a logical syllogism. This is true in regard to the Word which created and still sustains the universe. But it is just as true in regards to the written Word, the Scriptures. The Scriptures are indeed written in lingual sentence form. This lingual character of the Scriptures, although important, even foundational to the Scriptures, certainly does not qualify the Scriptures as the Word of God. This does not mean, as some suggest, that the Word is thus emptied of content, ephemeral—as if content was simply logical—it does mean that the content of the Word of God and the Scriptures as the Word of God is more than logical.

It is certainly true that the nature of the Word is revealed to us in the Scriptures through human lingual words, and human logical thoughts. God is chosen to reveal his Word after the Fall in this creaturely way. But we are doing injustice to the testimony of Scripture if we then reduce the Word to the words. In effect, if the Word is only words, we have reduced the living Word of God to propositions and syllogisms which we can manipulate in our human processes of reasoning. We have man-handled the Word—despite our best intentions to honour its sacred character. Certainly the “Let there be’s”—the words did not create the world. Obviously, the Scriptural lingual words are not that by which the world is upheld unto the present

day. Everything obeys the Word of God, all things are his servants. But it would be foolish to say the plants, animals, sun, moon, and stars obey the Bible.

12. In rearticulating the Word for creation, the Scriptures are completely in tune with it—and indeed point the Church to these norms or words further elucidation of God’s plan for life. Often, in fact, the Scriptures make these norms linguistically explicit. A few examples may help:

God created man by His Word. After the Fall he once again provides man [p.14>] with knowledge as to his nature. The word for man is then (confessionally-linguistically) re-articulated in human creaturely ways. (Gen. 1:20-28; Eccl. 12: 3; John 3:5, etc.)

The Word for marriage, which still makes marriage possible today is linguistically re-articulated in many places in the Scriptures. “For that reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling on to his wife” (Gen. 2: 24). “They are no longer two, therefore, but one body” (Matt. 19:6).

The Scriptures in many places also re-articulated the words of God for non human life. God sends his Word to the earth and the snow melts (Ps. 33, 104, 147, etc.).

Creation is maintained by Your words, all things, are Your servants (Ps.91 119). Led by this confessional certainty, we are called to further investigate the ins and outs of creation in all the many dimensions—economic, historic, ethical, physical, etc.

13. To move on, the Scriptures re-articulate the Word of God redemptively in a specific focus, which we shall call the certainty (or variously the doxological or confessional) focus.

Once more: The Scriptures, as the authoritative re-proclamation of the word, record in confessional focus God’s acts in which he shows himself ever anew faithful to his Word and so faithful that in the last days the Word became flesh.

The Scriptures reveal the fullness of the Word. They are authoritative for all of life. They do not only reveal that Word for one aspect of life—the pistical, edificatory, confessional or whatever else one calls it. The point is that the fullness of the Word for the redemption of man and creation is Inscripturated in the Bible has a unique focus. And in working out this authority, understanding this unique focus is most important.

May we not be satisfied to say that the Bible is a redemptive book having redemptive authority? Is it not enough to say that the Bible sheds light on all of life and that its central perspective or focus is redemptive?

Of course, we must say all that. But concentrating on the structural focus of the Scriptures helps us to read its message. Granted that the Scriptures are redemptive in nature and content, we still face the structural questions as to the way or manner, the how, in which the message of redemption is communicated. The message comes to the heart—right—but how? Every human experience affects man in his heart.

The Scriptures are for salvation. What is that mean? Often it is read to mean that it is directed to men's souls and only indirectly, and secondarily to culture. This leads to various sorts of problems. What does "indirectly" [p.15>] or "secondarily" mean? Frequently there is a complete divorce of the Scriptures and daily life. Others advocate that salvation is for all of life. But this raises the spectre of frustration in that the Scriptures do not answer in detail all of life's problems. The Scriptures are considered a divine programmed computer, but they contain embarrassingly few references to many modern problems. In such views, intentions notwithstanding, living by the Scriptures becomes a bit and miss: you-pick-that-I-choose-this affair.

Some advance in this situation is made, I suggest by paying particular attention to the specific structural focus which characterizes the Scriptures in its address to man.

In its redemptive intention, the Scriptures structurally addresses man's situation in terms of the functional necessity to believe, confess and have certainty.

We are faced with the claimed to be truthful and live up to promises we make. People ought to be able to count on us. Men ought to be able to meet out justice fairly. We must be stewards of our time. There is a requirement of physical and biotic health. People are called to be sensitive to one another's needs and to integrate their feeling life. Man must respond to various claims: there is also the invitation to be certain and to confess one's hope and surety.

Or a gain: we may get at human hearts in various ways: for example, thinking, money, art, etc. There is also the avenue of hope and certainty.

It is this last claim of the Lord that we would concentrate on for the moment. The reality of this dimension is experienced by everyone when he feels impelled to confess in whom his strength lies, when he cannot but tell others of the hope that is in him, when he feels urged to explore the roots which give deeply meaning to his life.

The reality of this dimension to human experience is tragically illustrated in the lives of those who believe there is no God. The tragedy of their existence is that paradoxically they must talk to God by answering the question of certainty. Even when their hearts are closed in his presence and do not desire to acknowledge his existence. If man does not believe in God, he will have other gods.

This side of life involving one's confession of certainty is unique in respect to other dimensions in that what is confessed leads all the other kinds of activities. The confession of one's heart commitment, his belief, either functions to open up or close down other activities to the Kingdom of God.

One could say that the certitudinal is the most complicated of aspects in that it gets at the heart of life-issues at the deepest possible functional ways. This means that all human activities are led by the confessional as an expression of heart commitment and at the same time every human activity by its creaturely structure leads the doer to answer the question of certainty: in [p.16>] whose strengths and to whose honour to you to this?

More concretely: one's troth, his judging, teaching, banking, writing, etc, lack wholeness, truth and stability until one has answered the credo or certainty question. A person is on the way to full integrity and integration only when the other sides of his life are explicitly opened up by his belief as to the certainty of his existence, a confession which itself points beyond the Word of God, which is certainty itself.

14. The Scriptures as the book of certainty concentrate on all of life from this confessional-certainty focus. Every type of activity is described—but always with this focus in mind. Since the certitudinal is the leading aspect, the scriptural certainty qualification or focus of the Scriptures enables the Scriptures to be authoritative for all of life.

Scripture deals with all of life, but its creaturely focus is the confessional opened-up or deepened meaning of events, acts, etc. Scripture tells us nothing outside of this confessional concentration. Scripture tells us, for example, about the duty of children to parents—and we can learn about such matters from the Scriptures. But that is not the full focus. Obedience to parents is seen in the perspective of the kingdom by means of its confessional meaning. Obedience to parents is talked of in a confessionally deepened away so that it becomes clear that such duties are only finally and fully to be judged meaningful or meaningless in light of the heart obedience of disobedience to Christ.

Scriptures speak, to say, "God gave us a son" language. Having a child is a family matter involving intercourse between husband and wife. Such an event can be looked at from consideration of the biotic-physical, psychic and economic aspects involved. But the Scriptures in the midst of their talk about all these matters know only the confessional focus. "God gave us a son" expresses confessionally the meaning of the act. It does not deny any of the other aspects involved, but its focus is distinct.

Thus it is perfectly natural that Luke records Elizabeth's reaction to her pregnancy: "The Lord has done this for me" (Luke 1:25).

There is nothing obscurantist about this is if the Bible presents our baby-in-the-cabbage or stork-in-the-sky theory of birth in order to avoid the physical sexual matter involved. Nor is Elizabeth adding some religious meaning to a physical act. It is

perfectly true, factual, and real. She is saying that since the Lord's Word holds for this area of life to, obedience to these Word brings blessing. In the final analysis, he has done it.

And just as in the case of birth announcements, Scripture presents all kinds of other details, but they are only meaningful in the confessional focus. Or again, Boaz pleads that the Lord recompensed Ruth—and then Boaz goes [p.17>] ahead and redeems her (Ruth 2:12). Thus time and time again, the Scriptures reveal that obedient human activities are God's activities. "Except the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Ps. 127). Ridiculously modern man says, and even believers tend to regard such statements today as simply metaphor.

Unbelievers do build houses that stand-up. In fact, unbelievers have generally shown themselves superior in cultural pursuits. No matter says that Psalmist and with him the Christian. Unless the house is built by those who confess that their strength is in the Lord it is finally without meaning and worth. This does not mean that it will not physically stand—that it might—but work or products not done in the name of the Lord or dedicated to his glory are not what they ought to be and are thus finally judged to be without weight (glory).

The writers of Scripture with confessional intention selected various incidents, sayings, facts, etc. and string them together by their confessional threads. For example, Naomi's and Abimelech's migration to Moab is not simply dealt with as an economic-political matter, although it certainly was that. Rather, the confessional meaning of this migration (turning their backs on the inheritance of the Lord and turning to these detestable people of Moab) is an issue. Orpah's and Ruth's meeting with Naomi is not recounted to praise Ruth's fidelity to her mother-in-law and rebuke Orpah's infidelity but to point out that Ruth's choice for Naomi was a choice for the God of Naomi. The conquest of Jericho is not described simply as a military campaign—which it was—but its confessional meaning is accentuated. Jericho will be and shall remain a sign, a confessional sign, for all to see, that Israel finds its strength in the Lord are not in its (military) might.

15. Thus, although the Scriptures are not a handbook for morals, construction, farming, business or textbook for the various sciences, they are by no means irrelevant to all these concerns. By no means. The Scriptures re-proclaim the entire Word of God, but in a confessional focus. Via the certainty focus, it has total and full authority with a range as wide as creation.

It is wrong, I believe, to say that they provide no guidelines. That provide clear-cut, unambiguous, confessional guidelines—whatever we do, we must do all in obedience to the Lord. This holds unequivocally. We know what and before whom we have to confess.

We know that only in the certainty found in Christ revealed in the Scripture we can move surely and freely in God's creation. Knowing that God's Word holds for all of life, we are empowered in the Spirit to further search out his will from our life in all its dimensions, and in all situations. We know that we will experience shalom in greater depth as we grow in our awareness of and obedience to his many-sided demands for life. [p.18>]

"Creation is maintained by your rulings, all things are your servants" (Ps. 119:91). Indeed, the Scriptures are inspired of God and are profitable for use in teaching, refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be bold (2 Tim. 3:16).

