

LECTURE II: “By What Authority Do We Say These Things?” Dualism and the Modern Rejection of Biblical Authority



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I. INTRODUCTION

“Hath God Said?” Did God actually say these things to you? Cloaked in the forms of inquiry, this deceptive attack by the Tempter, early in the Genesis narrative of human creation and fall, has real and destructive power. Matthew and Luke parallel the Genesis passage by describing how the Second Adam, Jesus, faced the Tempter, not in the garden but in the arid, desolate wilderness, and there the question was essentially the same, “Hath God Said?” The Christian faith has always faced, and continues to face, many and highly varied forms of attack, but in most cases, one way or another, the force and edge of such has been the antagonistic and often vehement denial of any notion of the absolute lordship of the triune God, and so of any assertion of the authoritative self-revelation of the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Yahweh, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ, and, thereby, by the Holy Spirit, in Holy Scripture.

The authority, yes the divine authority of Holy Scripture is *a*, if not *the* “first order” issue in any proper doctrine of Scripture, yes, even before inerrancy, about which I made a presentation yesterday. This no doubt surprises some and concerns others—is he denying or playing down the importance of the truthfulness of Scripture? Not at all. I am simply putting inerrancy in its proper place and order within God’s redemptive-Kingdom purposes, and so within the *larger* “faith once for all delivered to the saints.” As the late and much missed Carl Henry—and

many others—have pointed out repeatedly and correctly, biblical authority is *the* central issue here for it is *that* which distinguishes Scripture, and the gospel message therein, as the Word of God, the Word written, which will not return to God void. Under Christ, the Word made flesh, the written Word which derivatively results from God’s self-revelation and “inspiration,” and so, by the dynamic, powerful and personal, effective guidance and superintendence of the Holy Spirit.¹ As noted before, there are surely many works, e.g., textbooks in arithmetic, mathematics, which are literally “inerrant” but do not as such set before us the authoritative Word of God. And often brothers or sisters in Christ who do in fact hold a high view of biblical authority, but who, for one reason or another, hold back from affirming full biblical truthfulness, can be best won to a proper inerrancy position, not by “beating” them with the inerrancy issue, but by means of the biblical authority which they already espouse, but whose apparent implications they have not, perhaps, thought through thoroughly.

By taking this further, much of my argument herein is my deep concern that Christians understand, first, the clear fact that Western culture’s zealous pursuit and worship of self, subjectivism, is a devastating result grounded in the destructive effects of false dualisms that were re-injected into Western thinking. This has often led to strong, even violent, rejection of the authority of the God self-revealed in Jesus Christ, and so the divine authority of Holy Scripture, as the written Word of God. I must quickly prepare you for the fact that much of my discussion will be negative, i.e., showing where, some three centuries ago, Western culture in certain crucial domains was wrong, thinking contrary to the nature of things, etc. These shifts in Western thinking, before and since the 17th century, have created, again, a supreme crisis for the classical or historical orthodox Christian understanding of divine authority—divine authority that is not only faithful but also historical, and even textual. The reason for these shifts and the resulting crises are obviously manifold, but the late Thomas Torrance is surely correct when he emphasized especially the widespread and deep negative effects of the modern re-introduction, and the so-called “postmodern” extension, of cosmological and epistemological dualisms into Western culture as a whole, notably in the physical sciences, philosophy and, thereby, into Christian theology.²

¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows* (vol. 4; Waco, TX: 1976), thesis eleven.

² See, for example the following titles wherein Thomas Forsythe Torrance developed his critical and constructive engagement with modern and early postmodern dualisms, cosmological and epistemological: *Space, Time and Incarnation*; *Space, Time and Resurrection*; *The Ground and Grammar of Theolo-*

In what immediately follows I will attempt, succinctly, to lay bare the profoundly influential dualisms of René Descartes and his pantheistic disciple Baruch Spinoza, but due to time limitation I will focus especially on the potent cosmological dualism of Isaac Newton, which conceptually “cut God off” from the world, and so from all direct spatio-temporal action and objective self-disclosure or revelation, and the epistemological dualism of Immanuel Kant (“Newton’s philosopher”) whereby real knowledge of reality in itself, and especially of God, became impossible for “pure reason.”³

The effects of these two thinkers, a mathematician and a philosopher (who was very concerned for science), have variously and pervasively permeated and distorted modern and postmodern Christian theology and its understanding of the God-world, God-human relationships. Ever since “the Enlightenment,” the destructive effects of this dualism, this disjunctive thinking, this “thinking apart” what ought to be thought unitarily together, has negatively affected every Christian doctrine, but most notably the classic Judeo-Christian or historical orthodox Christian doctrine of God’s gracious self-disclosure, God’s revelation in and for the world. This rampant dualism has led and still leads to what Jewish philosopher Martin Buber has called “the conceptual letting go of God.”⁴

II. THE DUALISM OF DESCARTES AND SPINOZA

With acknowledged over-brevity, I must yet point out that René Descartes’ over-developed need for certainty, led, via his methodological doubt, to his well-known “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am).⁵ Thereby his portrayal of the solitary sovereign subject rules early modern thinking about the human being. It led to several very problematic, dualistic emphases—subject over against object, mind over against body, and thought over against language—all of which pulled apart what ought to have remained unitarily together, and which eventually invited “deconstruction” via Jacques Derrida, et al.

gy; God and Rationality; Christian Theology and Scientific Culture; Reality and Scientific Theology; Divine and Contingent Order.

³ John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (The Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 5; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), especially chapters one and three.

⁴ Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Harper Brothers, 1952).

⁵ See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method: Meditations and Principles* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1912, 2004).

One of Descartes' multitudinous "disciples," the Jewish philosopher Spinoza, took this dualism in ways of which his mentor would not have approved, but which, in a sense, were unpacked naturally from Cartesian bases. For his own socio-political purposes, and so to extricate himself and European culture as a whole from the significant continued impact of any and all religious authority, both Christian and Jewish, that limited human freedom—especially his own philosophical freedom, Spinoza deceptively undercut the scriptural-revelational bases of both Judaism and Christianity, and thereby their authority in European culture.⁶ In his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza took the "disguise" of a pious believer in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but one who "humbly" wanted to "improve" or "correct" and make right and righteous that tradition—to re-form it to faithful propriety, notably also in relation to philosophy. According to Spinoza, true religion and true philosophy never overlap. Religion deals only with morality and piety; philosophy deals with the truth. And both are conducive to an ordered peaceful state. But in fact Spinoza was thereby waging an aggressive attack on Christian and Jewish orthodoxy, which he equated with "superstition," while thereby actually pursuing radical freedom for his philosophical goals. "Religion" must change its foundations, nature and aims. Religion must be devalued, shown to be inferior and only for the ignorant and simple folk—all the while claiming for himself the role of champion for "true piety" and "religion." Spinoza's central targets are the authoritative bases of Jewish and Christian orthodoxy. Hence, the nature of miracles, revelation, and so especially Holy Scripture, and the relation of each of these to the "Word" or "Truth of God," as viewed by orthodoxy, are of special negative concern for Spinoza. While carefully mocking the "multitudes" for their "superstitious" homage to Scripture, "the shreds of antiquity," "rather than to the Word of God," Spinoza thereby strips Scripture of all divine authority. Spinoza reduces Holy Scripture to merely and only human writings given to the imagination, evocative and pictorial, and so meant to stir the piety of the ignorant masses. The apostolic writings, he says, are ad hoc teachings with no claim to authority. It is philosophy, he says, that deals in Truth. And the "Word of God" cannot be tainted by history, nor can it be verbal, and certainly never textual or written. The "Word," as thus "transcendentalized," stands only outside history, dualistically separated from all things historical and human.

⁶ Baruch Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (trans. R. H. M. Elwes New York: Dover, 1951), see esp. 157–190.

III. DUALISM IN NEWTON'S PHYSICS AND KANT'S PHILOSOPHY

But now we enter the real core of the modern and postmodern problem of dualism. Spinoza gave form and example to others who would further separate Scripture from an utterly transcendent "Word of God," but the most potent bases lay in the physics of Isaac Newton and the philosophy/epistemology of Immanuel Kant.

Clearly one's view of God, the God-world relation, and so God's providence, is highly formative on how one will then regard and/or limit what can be called "revelation," and especially whether God can truly and literally give discourse, speak, declare himself content-fully, including in *written* form. The real basis of the post-Enlightenment disputes regarding the Church's historic "Scripture Principle," and so its "Identity Thesis," i.e., that Scripture is literally (and here *is* means *is*) the written and divinely authoritative Word of God, is essentially a theological one. What is at stake in the movement of thought, especially from Newton through and beyond Kant, right to the present debates about revelation and Scripture, is ultimately our doctrine of God, and thereby God's relation or non-relation to us here within the four dimensional space-time continuum. What is the manner of God's involvement and activity here, and so in and with the wording/text of Scripture? Clearly, one's view of the nature and authority of Scripture is dynamically related to one's view of God. Holy Scripture as the written Word of God is affirmed as a result of affirmation of God's lordly, active and personal relationship to the world as Creator, active and caring Sustainer and Redeemer of the world. As we will observe, the modern re-introduction of cosmological and epistemological dualisms into Western thinking from the 17th century, especially via Newton and Kant, effected a false "construal" of God and the God-world relation which led first toward *deism* for some and toward *panentheism* for others. And for all these it meant the rejection of the historic Christian affirmation of both the Incarnation and that Scripture is the written and divinely authoritative Word of God.

To a large extent, the "modern" (pre-Einsteinian) approach to knowledge of the world arose in the West through Newton and, via Descartes, through Immanuel Kant. Consequently, alien disjunctions were clamped down on modern thought resulting in the loss of true objectivity. While I must leave out crucial details of Newton's system here, note that Newton's rigid, mechanical, deterministic system of cause and effect (the universe as a "big machine") separated absolute space and time (which he equated with the mind of God) from the more relative space and time

that we ordinarily experience.⁷ In this way, Newton made God (for his cosmological system) what he called the *divinum sensorium*, the infinite “containing mind,” which statically impresses rationality on the mechanistic universe, but only and always from the outside. God must remain deistically separate from the universe and from what occurs therein. But of special concern for us, Newton’s dualistic separation of absolute space and time from our empirical time and space conceptually cut God off from the world. This meant that God has no direct relation to anything or anyone therein, and so the negation of all theological objectivity, and all self-revelatory relations from God to, in and for the world. Newton’s projection of an unbridgeable “chasm” that separates the wholly other Deity from all ordinary empirical realities, in order to meet his need for mechanistic uniformity, meant the *a priori* impossibility of miracles, the incarnation of the Son, and of all actual divine revelation. Newton’s “universe” meant no “Thus says the Lord”! Reflecting the early church heresy, Newton was an “Arian” Christian, the direct result imposed by his absolute-relative, God-world dualism.

Later, in the aftermath of the excellent advances of, e.g., J. Clerk Maxwell and Einstein, it is recognized that apart from some narrow, quite limited usefulness, Newton’s physics had harmful effects on the sciences, scientific methodology, upon Western epistemology and, for our purposes, upon modern theology’s understanding of the God-world relation, and so upon the redemptive knowledge of God in the world. In Newton’s universe there can be no divine revelation in the classical Christian sense, *ergo* no written, divinely authoritative Word of God.

Kant was destructively central to the re-entrenchment of modern dualisms in the West. He took Newton’s separation of absolute and relative space and time, and so God from the world, and applied that separation directly to the human mind and its knowing processes. “Waked” from his “dogmatic slumbers” (as he put it) by reading Hume’s apparently skeptical empiricism, Kant re-worked his previous rationalism, and by his consequent and monumental *Critique of Pure Reason*, ushered in his “Copernican revolution” (or “reversal”) in philosophy and, thereby, also in theology.⁸ Empiricism had assigned a *passive* role to the human mental processes, i.e., no innate ideas, no constructive role for the mind, just an empty vessel receiving “impressions” from the external world. Kant concluded that such claims to mental passivity alone were faulty. Human

⁷ See Albert Einstein’s criticism of Newton’s problematic, mechanistic and dualistic views of the universe and its effects on Western thinking in his *Ideas and Opinions* (London: Souvenir, 1973). Note also, again, the above-mentioned works by Torrance.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman Kerrys Smith; New York, NY: Macmillan, 1929, 2003), 27–29, 74, 87, 149, etc.

knowledge needed firmer ground. Therefore, Kant postulated that the human mind was both *passive* at one level and *active* at another in order to more adequately deal with the varied elements of the human knowing processes, and to overcome the errors of both rationalism and empiricism. While affirming the need for sense data from outside, Kant “reverses” the knowing relation by conceiving that the object to be known must rather conform to and be molded by the *active* mental capacities. But this means that we cannot know objects or the world as they really are. Thus Kant separated the sense data of our experience (*phenomena*) from objects in the world as they truly are, essences, and all non-physical realities beyond any direct knowledge by human experience, including God, the “self” or immortal soul (*noumena*).

By this dualistic separation of *phenomena* from *noumena*, unknowable by “pure reason,” including God, Kant thereby applied Newton’s dualistic cosmology, his deistic separation of God from the world, to the human mind. For over 200 years the effects of that split have been vast in every sphere of human pursuit of knowledge, notably in Christian theology. All claims to knowledge of the truth of God or of the reality of God by, e.g., direct revelation, and so via Scripture, were thereby ruled out of court *a priori*. If Kant’s view is affirmed, can Christian theology exist? Can content-ful revelation from God be affirmed? Can Holy Scripture *be* the Word of God? No! not in the historical orthodox sense of the term. As Martin Buber also put it, God has been “eclipsed” for Western culture.

IV. DUALISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF SCHLEIERMACHER AND TILlich

Again, if Kant’s dualistic conclusions are affirmed, one cannot do theology in any way akin to historical orthodoxy, which assumes the reality and scriptural availability of the Word of God. If one accepts Kant’s dualistic severance of God from human knowing, one must take another methodological road. And that is precisely what F. D. E. Schleiermacher did. Schleiermacher, “the Father of Theological Liberalism” grudgingly accepted Kant’s conclusion, but sought to make an “end run” around Kant to God by a different path. Under the influence of his pietist upbringing, Romanticism, as well as Kant, Schleiermacher aimed for a way of doing theology that escaped Kant’s epistemology and dry moralism via “God-consciousness” or the “feeling of dependence on God.” If God cannot be known directly and as he is, if content-ful divine revelation and Scripture as the written Word of God have been “ruled out of court,” Schleiermacher took the Enlightenment route of subjectivism, making the human religious subject central (rather than the properly objective

Word of God). Specifically he made the religious feelings that result when we consciously choose to depend wholly upon the unknowable God, or “the All,” central to the theological task. Everything here is grounded in and from subjective human piety.⁹ Thereby, Kant’s “Copernican revolution (reversal)” in philosophy led to Schleiermacher’s reversal in theology. Rather than focusing on the graciously given objective self-revelation of God, as found especially in Scripture, for doing theology, Schleiermacher reversed that by making our human “religious feelings” or “piety” the data for doing theology. Assuming that God is the indirect “Source” of these “feelings,” the Kantian theologian or religious community must look within the self to analyze what these feelings indirectly tell us about their “God” source. Hence, theology and the methodological bases for liberal, neo-liberal, existentialist, et al.... theology ever since. Therein Scripture is clearly not regarded as the “Word of God”—a role claimed only for subjective pious feelings. But does Scripture have any role in this schema? Obviously, after Kant, revelatory noumena cannot partake of or be identified with written phenomena. For Schleiermacher, Scripture is merely a human record of religious feeling or experience, a record which can potentially enhance one’s own experience. No divine authority.

The pervasive negative effects of these dualisms have continued to permeate culture and theology, and about 100 years later a second prominent and influential example of the Newtonian-Kantian paradigm arose via the late Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann was known first as both a NT scholar and prominent theologian. While Bultmann was ironically critical of late 19th century and early 20th century liberal (or “Ritschilian”) theology for its divine immanentism, its “culture Christianity,” he retained much of the liberal theological foundations, methods and Schleiermacher-like religious subjectivism in “existentialist” form. He was widely known for “demythologizing” of the NT, for his radical form-criticism and for historical skepticism in relation to Scripture, all of it the result of these destructive dualisms upon his thinking—as upon so many in Western culture. If God is “deistically” shut out from any direct relation to the world, and if the “noumenal” God conceptually is cut off from all human knowledge, i.e., unknowable as he really is, how can we reckon or affirm any kind of God-human connection at all? Bultmann

⁹ Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (trans. H. R. MacKintosh and James S. Stewart Edinburgh; T&T Clark, 1928, 1960), 10–12, 69–76, 87–88. See also the important criticisms by Klaus Bockmühl, *The Unreal God of Modern Theology: Bultmann, Barth, and the Theology of Atheism: A Call to Recovering the Truth of God's Reality* (trans. Geoffrey Bromiley; Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1988).

strongly emphasized God's transcendence, to the extent that he was in fact a "deist."¹⁰ According to Bultmann, the universe is a closed system of cause and effect. Hence, no miracles, no incarnation, no contentful Word of God, no "Thus says the Lord." He also emphasizes that people are hopeless and helpless in their sin, which he describes for 20th century culture, in terms of Martin Heidegger's notion of "inauthenticity," as utterly estranged from God, world and our true selfhood ("authenticity"). Though desperately needing redemption to authenticity, we can do nothing. But *paradoxically* the "wholly other" God, though shut out from direct relation to us, somehow indirectly meets or "encounters" us through the gospel telling of Jesus' existential courage to and on the cross. Through that human declaration of "good news," God is said to encounter us existentially and to empower us to freely choose for authenticity. We are thereby transformed to true selfhood, etc. Clearly, the focus is not God, not Jesus, but the subjective, existing human "I." It's all about "me"! Where, then, is Scripture and scriptural authority in this highly influential theological approach? Does Bultmann have any authoritative role for Scripture in relation to "the Word of God's personal address to me"? Here the message of the NT biblical documents can be the *human* textual *occasion* for God's paradoxical, existential, but utterly empty, content-less "Word," which encounters the individual, calling him/her to choose authentic faith. This transcendent, transformative but empty "Word" somehow addresses one through the NT Kerygma. But then, as one true to Newton and Kant, Bultmann must then regard Scripture as necessarily without divine authority. His dualistic commitments mean that God can be "known," i.e., "experienced," only subjectively as he existentially "acts in me."

Also standing most prominently in Newtonian-Kantian dualistic tradition, specifically as a philosophical theologian, is the late Paul Tillich. Tillich said that he ever worked "on the boundary," e.g., between theology and philosophy, between Christianity and humanism. His numerous works, notably his three volume *Systematic Theology*, have had monumental influence throughout modern and many strains of postmodern theology, notably in neo-liberal and existentialist schools of thought. His work reflects the influence not only of Newton and Kant, but also of Neo-Platonism (mysticism), German Idealism (Hegel, Schelling), Friedrich Nietzsche and (like Bultmann) Heidegger. In contrast to Bult-

¹⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribners, 1958), especially chapters two and three; and his article "How Does God Speak Through the Bible" in *Existence and Faith* (ed. Schubert Ogden; New York: Meridian Books, 1960).

mann's "deism," Tillich's theological work was meant to reflect what he regarded as the panentheistic relation of the "Ground of Being," "Ultimate," "Depth Dimension," or in terms of theological symbol, "God," in and through all human culture (and religions). But especially, given his existential analysis of estranged and anxious human beings, alienated from "God" because of "fallenness," he says, "my whole theological work has been directed to the interpretation of (revelatory) religious *symbols* in a way that the secular man—and we are all secular—can understand and be (transformed) by them."¹¹ How does that relate to the problem of dualism and so the question of the authority of Scripture? While Schleiermacher claimed that "the feeling of dependence" and Bultmann God's non-historical, "existential encounter" through the gospel, bridged the dualistic chasm between the otherwise totally unknowable God and persons in the here and now, for Tillich this is accomplished especially by Christian religious symbols. While true "symbols" are found in all domains, e.g., perhaps the American flag or the British Union Jack and the nation, religious symbols (which can potentially be any finite thing, e.g., the word "God," the Cross, Jesus as the Christ) uniquely answer the most basic human existential questions by bringing the healing/saving power of "Essence"/the "Ground of Being" (God) across the Kantian "divide" to our anxious, estranged existence apart from God, with the goal being redemptive re-essentialization/salvation. Despite our existential fallenness, finite things can "miraculously" take on the second capacity of being to us the channel for the healing presence of "God." Through this process of "revelation," according to Tillich, the "Power of Being" or, symbolically, "God" breaks in "to us." Well, if such a "revelation" supposedly crosses the Kantian chasm, what of Scripture for Tillich and the many who follow his influential lead? As a modern dualist, Tillich rejects the classical Judeo-Christian claim that God reveals himself personally, lovingly, truthfully, content-fully, and so verbally and even textually. Tillich regards any such connection between "Word of God" and Scripture, then, to be a serious error. Rather, he says Scripture is a human text which "God" can potentially use "symbolically." In that way,

¹¹ Paul Tillich's "systematic" presentation of his views on the human existential condition, his view of "God" as the "Ground of Being," et al., as "answering" that anxious condition and the role of religious symbols mediating the divine to the historical and human realm, especially observable in his symbol "Jesus as the Christ," one best portrayed in his *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951–1957), 1:12–14, 23, 64–66, 80, 94, 108–126, 157–159, 2:29–44, 97–99, 113, 117–124, 130–136, 145–146. For a more semi-popular introduction see Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957).

Scripture, like a man-made conduit/pipe, can mediate the transforming power of “Being Itself” to us.

V. THE INFLUENCE OF DUALISM AMONG EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIANS

Perhaps you have noticed that, because of the effects of these modern dualisms upon theology, and especially on views of revelation and Scripture, that the result has been the modern (and postmodern) rejection of the classical “identity thesis,” the historical Christian claim that, under Christ the Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture *is* the divinely authoritative written Word of God. Any such claim that God can only “use” the human text of Scripture is herein a case of what we can call “bibliological adoptionism” (from the early Church heresy). But still, these are prominent theological liberals and existential neo-liberals. Surely such dualism, such disjunctive separation, is not found among theologians claiming the stamp “evangelical,” and so connection to historical orthodoxy. Unfortunately, in recent years, this is too often not the case. The historic, evangelical, orthodox affirmation that, under Christ the Word and by the working of the Spirit, Holy Scripture is a crucial element/aspect in and of the economy of God’s gracious self-revelation in order to be known objectively and adequately as he is in himself by we space-time human beings, has too often been giving way among confessed “evangelicals.” It has been a subtle and nuanced move away from actual *identification* of the Word of God and the text of Scripture at any level except, perhaps, in terms, again, of a formal “adoptionist” or, perhaps, an “Arian” sense. I will mention three who have been among the most influential in this way: Donald Bloesch, Gabriel Fackre and the late Clark Pinnock.

For many years, Donald Bloesch has been a prominent evangelical theologian teaching within mainline protestant theological circles. In his much used *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, he seeks a dialectical middle way between historical orthodoxy and classical evangelicalism on the one hand, at which he hurls numerous names (e.g., static, rationalistic neo-fundamentalism) in *ad hominem* fashion, and modern liberalism, on the other, so that whatever is in his own middle ground is necessarily the “high ground” of *real* “evangelicalism.”¹² Bloesch is subtle and careful and given often to speaking of Scripture in glowing terms, even “Word of God” for a while. But against the claims to what he calls “frozen truth” and the “Docetism” of historical ortho-

¹² Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1944).

doxy, Bloesch takes a so-called “Barthian” path, to the left of even Barth, by distinguishing and dualistically separating the “transcendent content” of divine revelation and its one real historical form in Jesus Christ, on the one hand, from Scripture as the actual historical written Word of God, on the other. Rather, he says, Scripture is finally only a special human witness to the one Word which is only Christ. Yet, Bloesch piously says that this human text can “become the Word” when, by the Spirit, it is made to communicate the truth and power of Christ to us. But it is *not* the written Word of God as such. It is notable that, except for a few minimal citations in notes, Bloesch all but passes by any biblical discussion of inspiration, e.g., 2 Tim 3; 2 Peter 1—a *very* telling reflection on Bloesch’s agenda. For Bloesch, inspiration is not a past action and illumination of Scripture by the Spirit a present act; rather, for him “inspiration” occurs in the existential “moment” when the Spirit makes the human text of Scripture now, “adoptionistically,” God’s Word to me. But the true “Word” transcends all language and all human witness, which is reflective of Bloesch’s Neo-Platonic fear, that should God’s “Word” ever become truly historical, even textual, i.e., Scripture, it would be thereby sullied, dirtied, stained, tarnished. What then of the Incarnation?

Gabriel Fackre has also long labored theologically in mainline Reformed circles, teaching at Andover-Newton Theological School in Massachusetts. There he has purposed to do what he terms a “properly evangelical” theology in the midst of other much more diverse theological currents. A commendable and surely difficult goal. In his work, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation*, Fackre seeks to reformulate an “evangelical” approach to revelation and Scripture, with much formative influence from Catholic scholar Avery Dulles’ (now cardinal Dulles) *Models of Revelation* and, too, his own interpretation and use of Karl Barth. Hence, Fackre wants to revise what Dulles calls the “Revelation as Doctrine” model, i.e., the view of historical Christian orthodoxy, by means of the particular “Barthian” emphasis on revelation as emphatically “Christocentric”—which, by the way, if properly balanced, is correct, i.e., Jesus Christ is surely the *center* and *ultimate* basis of all revelation, but he is not the only revelation.¹³ Despite Fackre’s initial criticism of Tillich’s claim of non-cognitive “revelation” via symbols and much of so-called “Barthian” existential Christocentrism that seems to make Jesus, “the Word made flesh,” the one and only Word of God, he finally falls in step with that very same conclusion. For Fackre, too, Jesus Christ is the *one and only* true Word of God, while Scripture is (again) merely the human “witness to that Word.” Thus Scripture, for Fackre, while mightily used by the Spirit, at last stands *outside* of what can be rightly

¹³ Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

regarded as divine revelation, the Word of God. Again, we find expressed herein a continuity or fear that any claim to historical and textual identity or real God-given relation between the Incarnate Word and Scripture imperils the proper centrality of Christ. Of course, that is not true, but that is the motivating fear. Yet it must be acknowledged that Fackre seems to sense that the problem of dualism must be faced and dealt with, that he wants to close the Kantian “chasm” between God and a “transcendentalized” divine Word and historical human existence and our great need for a coherent, content-ful “Thus says the Lord.” For that reason he actually tries to approach the issue of “inspiration” as Bloesch does not. But unfortunately he does so by trying to dialectically contrast his own view from that of historical Christian orthodoxy (as recently reflected in Carl Henry and J. I. Packer, et al.), thereby finally placing “the Word,” again, outside of history, beyond Scripture and (via Jürgen Moltmann) only at the end of history in the *eschaton*. The real “Word,” then, is non-historical, non-linguistic, non-textual. Fackre, too, finally submits to false dualism and so wrongly denies that Scripture is the written Word of God.

My third example of theological and bibliological dualism within evangelicalism is the late Clark Pinnock. Clark was a friend with whom, from time to time, I agreed to disagree agreeably. Each of us knew where the other stood. Clark completed his long teaching career at McMaster Divinity School, within McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Years after his notable work *Biblical Revelation*, Pinnock reflected his changed views on the nature of Scripture in his controversial work, *The Scripture Principle*.¹⁴ Of the three evangelical works we’ve examined, this is in some ways the best. Pinnock is usually more candid, honest, openly grappling with issues which Bloesch and Fackre handle with calculated ambiguity. Pinnock takes the classic Protestant affirmation, “the Scripture Principle” and defines it in two parts: first, he says there is a place where the Word of God is accessible in human form, the text of Scripture as God’s written Word, and so a place that reveals God’s mind authoritatively for us to heed; second, the need for a defense of biblical authority and trustworthiness against the present crisis regarding “the Scripture Principle.” All of this sounds excellent and most commendable. How then does he unpack this stated intention? Like the Christian theological tradition, and like the distinctive directions of Bloesch and

¹⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1984), see esp. 32–40, 43–54, 57–62, 95–101, 188–191. See also Pinnock’s book length dialogue with process and neo-liberal theologian, Delwin Brown entitled *Theological Crossfire*. Therein, note especially Section one, part two.

Fackre, Pinnock, too, rightly emphasizes that all of God's self-revelation is ultimately *Christocentric* in pattern and *salvational* in purpose. But does Pinnock use the centrality of Christ to affirm Scripture's divine authority or, like Bloesch and Fackre, to finally deny that authority? From his own initial use and definition of "the Scripture Principle" as the affirmation that in Scripture the Word of God has taken human *and* textual form, that therefore Scripture is not only a human text (by Isaiah, Paul, et al.) but at the same time also God's own written Word, and with that his explanation and assertion of "inspiration" as the divinely effected process whereby this occurred, it would seem that Pinnock is espousing that "Holy Scripture is the inspired Word of God," divinely authoritative in the classic Christian sense. Alas no. Throughout Pinnock's argument he repeatedly makes what turns out to be telling descriptive terms, e.g., Scripture as mere "medium," "vehicle" or "conveyor" of God's revelation, revelation then being something *other*, different, beyond the text of Scripture, having then only formal or functional relation to Scripture. Yes, Scripture is obviously given in human language. Yes, orthodoxy has always recognized divine "accommodation"—that God condescended to speak "down" on our level. But does this require disjunction, dualistic separation from the revelation of God? Hardly! Quite the opposite. Yet for Pinnock, finally, this dualism becomes dominant. Two vivid and picturesque images or metaphors become formative for Pinnock: first, Scripture as a freight train carrying the freight, the transcendent Word of God which is then not the train, and second, Scripture as a product not *of* revelation but *for* revelation, i.e., the Scripture as the "switch track" by which the transcendent Word beyond Scripture is mediated (as through a pipe) into the human situation. Again, problematic dualistic conceptualities have falsely gripped such evangelical thinking to its loss, "thinking apart" what ought to be thought together, i.e., Scripture *is* the written, and so divinely authoritative, Word of God.

VI. THE PROBLEM OF UNDERSTANDING GOD'S SPEECH

So how are we to respond to this modern dualistic impact, these destructive effects, upon how we regard God's relation to us, upon what we perceive that God can, or rather cannot, enact in our midst, and hence upon our understanding of the nature and authority of Holy Scripture? Is such a disjunctive cutting off of Scripture from the Word of God in fact a long needed corrective to the historical orthodox position of the Church and its "Identity Thesis"? Ought we at last to recognize that the real, *ideal* Word of God is utterly other, beyond our space-time continuum and so beyond any humiliating written and textual form, beyond any debasing relation to inadequate human languages? *No!* In the Name of the

Incarnate Word, the risen Savior, who ever affirmed the divine authority of Scripture, *No!*

Before restating, reaffirming, reconfessing, Scripture's divine authority, let me, with radical and (probably) injudicious brevity point to three crucial, interrelated clarifications or reminders, among others, that direct us properly to conclusions emphatically contrary to all of these false and debilitating conclusions: the adequacy of human language, that God is a human language user, and Scripture as God's illocutionary "speech act."

First, can human linguistic forms, human language, even written human language ever be properly reckoned as written the Word of God? Again, historically the Church has answered, "Yes." The writers of Scripture themselves clearly and often asserted variously that Yahweh, the covenant God of Sinai, the triune God, is the speaking God who declares himself and his ways to, in and through, his prophets and apostles. But, for reasons we've observed, Western culture as given in to the spurious modern and postmodern assumption that all language is an inadequate means of personal communication, thus effecting human isolation. And if that is so, how much more is that true of God. In fact, the opposite is true. And alongside a resurgent, dualistic Neo-Platonic mysticism there has, in recent decades, been added "eastern" religious notions, both of which stress the "ineffability" and "inexpressibility" of the utterly remote, amorphous or undifferentiated "divine." In all, then, there has occurred our contemporary doubt that human language can communicate the reality of God at all—even if God were endeavoring thus to act and speak to us. Rather, as John Frame well states the biblical corrective:

God's transcendence (so understood) implies that God cannot be clearly revealed or represented to us in human words . . . (But) Scripture never deduces from God's transcendence the inadequacy and fallibility (let alone the impossibility) of all verbal revelation. Quite the contrary . . . verbal revelation is to be obeyed (as authoritative) *because* of the divine transcendence.¹⁵

Rather, like the Reformers, we ought to emphasize God's gracious condescension, the "humility" of God whereby he powerfully and lo-

¹⁵ John M. Fame, "God and Biblical Language" in *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1977). See also J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language" in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman Geisler; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980). One ought also to examine carefully John Frame's subsequent and excellent book-length development of this and related issues in his *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987).

vingly identifies with that which is beneath him. Indeed, in the text of Scripture God willingly and actively became “undignified” for our redemption.

Let me take that a step further with the help of evangelical Christian philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff, recently retired from Yale. In his influential Wilde Lectures at Oxford University, published as *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, Wolterstorff examines the “strange but riveting” declaration, introduced to humanity by Judaism, that “God speaks to us on our way, and that our calling as human beings is to listen to that speech from beyond and hear.”¹⁶ As we have strongly acknowledged and evidenced previously in our argument herein, the idea of God speaking—historical divine disclosure or discourse—has faced much hostility in modernity. Wolterstorff calls this antagonism “ill-advised” and “self-defeating.” Since the Enlightenment especially, any religious reference to “God speaking” is in mainline religious contexts regarded only as non-literal, metaphorical, symbolic of something else, usually a vacuous subjective experience (recall Schleiermacher and the others after Kant). Yet, as we also saw, even Bloesch, et al., finally balk at the radical historicity required for God to be a *literal* human language user, whether at Mount Sinai or the text of Holy Scripture, and so the proper identity between Scripture and the Word of God.

What of Wolterstorff? Wolterstorff does not balk. Rather, beginning from his detailed opening analysis of the incident in Augustine’s *Confessions* of the child’s voice saying, “*Tolle lege, tolle lege*,” “take up and read, take up and read,” which Augustine took to be God’s command there and then to take and read the text from Romans, which changed his life in an instant, and altered the course of much of Western culture through him, Wolterstorff asserts that somehow, against all such modern opposition, God is capable of using human language to speak to us historically, and he has in fact done so. It is the answering of that “somehow,” seeking possible coherent and partial explanation of how God discourses with us, that generates the development of Wolterstorff’s argument. Notably for us here, Wolterstorff helpfully develops at length the notion of “deputized discourse,” e.g., God speaking through a divinely “deputized” prophet or apostle whereby, then, the prophet’s/apostle’s speaking becomes also God’s speaking, and, to be more particular, the prophet’s (or apostle’s) specifically prophetic/apostolic writing, too, is also included therein as *God’s own* authorized, hence *authoritative*, “deputized” discourse. He concludes that there is good reason to regard

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), see esp. ix, 27–28, 70–73, 186, 281–283, 298–299.

Christian Scripture, the canon, as the God-given medium of divine discourse, the written Word of God, and, as described, God can rightly be regarded thereby the “author of the Bible.”

Finally, it is the conclusion of numerous contemporary evangelical theologians, myself included, that the analogical, carefully principled application of influential “Speech-Act Theory” to what Scripture itself says about the way God reveals himself to us, has significantly clarified a proper “trinitarian theology of Holy Scripture.”¹⁷ Two of those at the forefront of developing these insights are Wolterstorff and especially Kevin Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer, too, reflects constructively on prominent recent developments in the philosophy of language from the later Wittgenstein and especially through J. L. Austin and John Searle. Crucial for our purposes is Austin’s breakthrough recognition of and Searle’s clarification of the fact that every human “speech act,” e.g., assertion, command, promise, etc., renders the speaker or author a “communicative agent,” a *doer* of a speech-action. All proper saying or writing is a verbal “doing” and has within itself three more distinctive linguistic acts that effect the larger Speech Act. These are: (1) the locutionary act, i.e., the actual uttering or saying or expression of something; (2) the illocutionary act, i.e., *what* it is we *do* in saying something (e.g., commanding); (3) the perlocutionary act, i.e., what we *effect* in others by our saying something (e.g., persuading). But it is especially the recognition of the *illocutionary* act that enables distinction between the content of what is said (sense and reference) and its force (what a sentence *does*). Illocutions are all-important to the speaker’s/author’s role as an *intentional* communicative agent. This can be applied almost directly over to God’s act of speaking or revelation, the recognition of God as a “Trinitarian” communicative Agent. Reflecting the biblical data, God the Father is the “utterer,” his action is “locution,” the begetter and upholder of words (Heb 1:1–2), who “spoke to the prophets.” The Logos-Son corresponds to the speaking Father’s act of illocution, what the Father *does* by thus speaking. The Son-Word as illocution is the content, reference and intention of the Father’s uttering, making him “count as” what the Father intended for us. The Holy Spirit corresponds to the third active element of a divine speech-act, the *perlocution* or the *effect* of an illocutionary act on the actions or beliefs of the hearer or reader. Hence, the triune God, in and by his communicative act, is the Lordly paradigm of all inherently covenan-

¹⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); and Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002). In *Meaning* see especially 19–28, 43–148; in *First Theology* see especially 20, 34–35, 148–157.

tal and missional communication. And therein, according to this Trinitarian theology of Scripture, i.e., God's speaking from the Father, in and through the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Vanhoozer explains how Holy Scripture is itself "God's illocutionary speech action," the written Word of God, and that as a *result* of God's mighty Speech Acts. And his Word will not return to him void (Isa. 55:11).

VII. CONCLUSION: SCRIPTURE AS THE AUTHORITATIVE WORD OF GOD

Obviously, given the limitations required here, I could give but a "taste," but "the hem of the garment" of these developments, which perhaps, some here have or will be able to examine. I also cannot take time now to elaborate on the overthrow of much of Newtonian determinism, mechanism and dualism that has occurred in the last century plus, via Christian physicist J. Clerk Maxwell, Einstein, and others, who have helped to move significant portions of Western science back toward a proper objectivity, not only in the physical sciences but also in epistemology, and so our ability to know not everything (potentially) and not nothing, but by the gift and grace of God to know *adequately*. What I will do now is to tie together a few interrelated elements toward a fresh statement and affirmation that Holy Scripture *is* the divinely authoritative, written Word of God.

First, the so-called "Barthian" understanding (often rather different from Barth's own later, mature position) of the Word of God as finally other than and dualistically separated from or beyond Holy Scripture, a view too often influential upon sectors of broader evangelicalism, including Bloesch, Fackre and Pinnock, is both wrong and right at different levels. Barth's *christocentricity*, his point that *the* ultimate Word of God is Jesus Christ is surely biblical. The openings of John, Colossians and Hebrews et al., tell us, e.g., that the Word (*logos*) who is God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus of Nazareth *is* the Word of God in an eternally pre-eminent way. He is, we may say, the ontological Word of God. But does this fact negate the biblical necessity of affirming that Holy Scripture, too, is the *written* Word of God? Certainly not. While it is, indeed, also biblical to refer to Scripture as a primary "witness to Christ," as Jesus himself teaches in John 5:39, this distinction of Christ the Word from Scripture's Spirit-inspired testimony to him does not thereby negate Scripture's continuity with and nuanced identity with and under Christ the Word as the written, and so divinely authoritative, Word of God. Indeed, the Father and the Holy Spirit also bear witness to Christ, and that hardly negates their divine authority. How then should these interrelated elements be brought together in a way faithful to Scripture's teaching,

and so to “the faith once for all delivered to the saints”? If Jesus is the unique incarnate Word, and if OT and NT Scriptures repeatedly speak of their own status as divine revelation and/or the written Word of God, a status to which Jesus himself constantly testified, and yet Scripture also “testifies” to Christ as distinct (but not dualistically separate) from itself, then we must avoid a flat and undifferentiated identity between Jesus Christ (the divine-human *person*) and Scripture (the divine-human *product*). But at the same time, *contra* Bloesch, et al., we must strenuously reject all dualistic, disjunctive thinking that finally separates Christ the ultimate Word from the “inscripturated” or “in-scribed” Word, as though Scripture were a mere human word after all, which is somehow occasionally, “adoptionistically” and temporarily “made” the Word if and when used by the Holy Spirit. Faith-ful, unitary biblical thinking here will “think after” the “identity-in-distinction” inherent in this relationship, relations also similarly observable in the crucial *homoousion* term of the “Nicene Creed,” and so the “oneness-in-distinction” of the Trinity. Therefore, in, under, of and from the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and by the effective, powerful working of the Holy Spirit via the Spirit’s operations of revelation and inspiration (*Theopneustos*, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21, etc.), Holy Scripture *is*, again *is*, the divinely authoritative, written and truthful Word of God, its authority and truthfulness grounded not only in itself, but ultimately, by the Spirit, in Christ the Son, and God the Father, and so finally in and of the perichoretic or coherent relations within the eternal, triune Godhead.¹⁸ Praise God for his unspeakably wonderful gift, the written Word of God and the Gospel therein. To God alone be the glory. Amen.

¹⁸ In relation to all these crucial issues in Revelation and Holy Scripture and, therein, especially the relation of Scripture as Word of God and Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, and all in relation to the triune Godhead, I must point the reader to my book on these matters: John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said? Scripture, the Word of God and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), especially my new “model” of Revelation and Holy Scripture in chapter eight, “Einstein, Torrance and Calvin: A Christocentric, Multileveled, Interactive Model of Scripture as the Written Word of God.”