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The Bible's Authority and the Church's Interpretive Task



P. Andrew Sandlin

The choice to stand within what Oscar Cullmann terms the “strange history of salvation”¹ necessitates adoption of a particular attitude toward the Christian Scriptures. The decision of Jesus’ apostles to leave all and to follow him was necessarily a choice to submit to his teaching, which included an affirmation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17–20; Luke 16:27–31). Similarly, to follow Jesus *today* is to adopt the inspired writings of his accredited representatives enshrined in the *New Testament*. Christians, therefore, affirm the Old and New Testaments as their Master would affirm them—a conveyance of the very Word of God.² We do not enjoy the option of embracing a view of the Scripture different from what Jesus himself held.³

As followers of Jesus, there is no neutral, objective vantage point from which to assess our attitude toward the Bible; and to those standing outside this relationship, we cannot offer a rationally compelling reason for their accepting it.⁴ We cannot situate in a vacuum our apologetic for affirming the Bible as God’s Word. *It stands and falls with our choice to follow Jesus.*⁵ Jesus did not first verify his prospective disciples’ view of the Old Testament and later actually disciple them; belief in the Bible is predicated on discipleship. We cannot offer cogent, rational arguments that can persuade one who resists this

calling to discipleship—and it is futile to offer such arguments. The choice to be Christian is equally the choice to accept the authority of the Christian Scriptures. To unbelievers, the things of God are folly (1 Corinthians 2:14). Their only hope for spiritual understanding (and this includes the understanding that the Bible is God's Word) is the sweet lure of the Holy Spirit in the efficacious preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. An altered (and valid) understanding of the role of the Bible is the result of an altered relationship to a person—Jesus Christ.⁶

This assertion admittedly implies circularity—we believe the Bible because Jesus told us to believe it, and we believe in Jesus because we read what he said in the Bible. This circularity should not trouble us. Ultimate truth claims always entail such circularity, for if they did not, they would not be ultimate, but at best *penultimate*. There is no *deeper* epistemic justification for ultimate truth claims—this is what makes them ultimate.⁷

To Christians, the Bible is authoritative because, in fact, it conveys the Word of God.⁸ This postulate is a matter of faith, not of demonstration. It is the message of God not only because it claims to be but also because to the Christian it can be nothing less. God *authenticates* this Word to us by the internal testimony of his Spirit, who seals its validity to our hearts.⁹ Neither the church nor external evidence finally validates the Bible; only God the Holy Spirit can validate his own Word.

Here I address three ways in which the Bible as God's authoritative Word should shape our interpretation of it.

AUTHORITY AND FOCUS

What is the focus of the Bible? We cannot grasp the nature of its authority, and we cannot understand how it should be interpreted, if we do not understand its focus. The Bible is not authoritative generically but in terms of its scope and purpose. This is true of all books. For instance, a mathematics text may be authoritative (even conceivably infallible), but this is not the *sort* of the authority that we encounter in the Bible.

The Bible is a certain *kind* of book; and if we do not understand the kind of book it is, we will anticipate a *kind* of authority it does not possess and interpret it in a way its author never intended.

The Bible is a book relating the events of God's historical dealings with his people, an interpretation of those events, and instruction on how individuals are to live in terms of the interpretation of those events. "The uniqueness and the scandal of the Christian religion," George E. Ladd writes, "rest in the mediation of revelation through historical events."¹⁰ In Genesis we encounter a narrative of God's creation of the universe and of his calling of a people, Israel. In fact, the first three chapters constitute an introduction to the calling of Abraham and the Jewish people; they are not a stand-alone description of the universe's origins.¹¹ We do not find in the Bible an elaborate explanation of a natural theology, but rather of God's dealings with a specific race and nation and, in the New Testament, of his dealings with a concrete multinational and multiethnic kingdom of which his Son's church plays a pivotal role.

This calling of a people has at its core specific, unrepeatable, momentous, redemptive events that are recounted again and again. In the Old Testament, these events cluster around the Exodus from Egypt and the covenant making at Sinai. In the New Testament, these events compose the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament depicts the *Old Testament's* redemptive events as foreshadowing and predicting the redemptive ministry of Jesus. The Bible, therefore, has a *Christic* focus (Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39). In this sense we may declare that the passion narratives of the Gospels constitute the heart of Biblical revelation—the Old Testament points forward to them, and the subsequent New Testament explains and elaborates on them. The Bible, in other words, essentially tells us (1) what God has done in history in the person of his Son Jesus, (2) what this redemptive activity means, and (3) how his called-out people should act in terms of this activity.¹² In short, the Bible is *redemptive-historical*. To conceive of it

(as theological liberals, as well as some conservatives, have sometimes been inclined) as a system of exemplary ethics or socio-political liberation or self-improvement information, apart from the historical redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ, is to misunderstand its fundamental character, which is redemptive-historical.

It is imperative to recognize that the Bible's emphasis is the *kerygma*, the primitive apostolic message, at the heart of which is the gospel. The Bible is essentially an *evangelical* book. Its goal is to relate to us the *evangel*, the good news, so that many may hear and be saved (John 20:31; 1 John 5:13). Its fundamental character is redemptive-historical because the historic events it relates and interprets form the cornerstone of the gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus, in whom alone we may have eternal life (John 3:16–17). In short, the Bible is a *gospel* book, disclosing what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of sinners (2 Corinthians 5:19). This conception stands in sharp contrast to the sentiment that “divine propositional revelation is the indispensable axiom, the starting point, the first principle of Christianity.”¹³ The “first principle of Christianity” is not the Bible, but what the Bible points to—God's redemptive work in his Son Jesus accomplished two thousand years ago on the cross and from the empty tomb. The Bible is not a revelation calculated to be a “first principle” of anything; it is a *witness* to the saving work of God in history.

To assert that the focus of Scripture is redemptive-historical, however, is not to hold that it addresses only redemptive topics, narrowly considered. John M. Frame is correct to note that if the Bible *only* narrates and interprets historical events, it is hard to account for the Wisdom Literature (like the Psalms and Proverbs) as well as the ethical portions (like parts of the Pentateuch). Frame further queries, if it is all just narrative and interpretation, why all the repetition? Why both Kings and Chronicles? Why *four* Gospels?¹⁴ The point is well taken. However, if we grasp that an aspect of redemption is the *wisdom* that we as blood-bought disciples of Jesus should assimilate and the *ethics* we should practice, this concern vanishes.

The Bible is all about what God has done in Jesus, and what his followers should *do* about what he has done.

Proponents of this understanding sometimes declare that the Bible is not a textbook on biology, psychology, politics, geography, geology, agriculture, and so on.¹⁵ This declaration is correct, but it may create a false impression. The fact that biology, psychology, politics, geology, and agriculture do not fall within the scope of the Bible does not imply that the Bible does not touch on issues crucial to these (and other) topics; and when it does touch on them, it does so authoritatively. A Biblical anthropology, for instance, should inform a Christian approach to psychology. The Biblical picture of woman and man is one of unified, not composite, beings, as they are wrongly depicted in a Hellenistic and classical anthropology.¹⁶ Christians should account for this biblical picture in formulating their approach to psychology, but they should not assume that the Bible provides all information whatsoever—or even most information—about a valid psychology, or that furnishing a psychology is within the scope of the Bible. We must look elsewhere for that data. We cannot circumvent God's revelation in creation, for example, in a sincere but misguided attempt to construct a distinctly Christian psychology.

The same is true of the terms of justice in the civil realm. In the context of both national Israel and the multinational church as covenant bodies, the Bible sets forth terms of justice suited to the political realm. This justice as a divine revelation reflects God's character and should be enshrined in human systems of law—for instance, the sanctity of private property (Exodus 20:15; 22:1–17); provision for the defenseless and poor (Exodus 23:11; 22:21–24); prohibition and punishment of murder, kidnapping, rape (Exodus 20:13; 21:16; Deuteronomy 22:25), and so on.¹⁷ The Bible does not, though, disclose a fully formed system of political government—and it was never intended to be used in this way. The Bible does not envision modern liberal democracy, for example, and it does not imply that monarchies, empires, or governments by the few (oligarchies) are the only acceptable forms of civil government. Therefore, relying today on empirical data as to how a

liberal democracy actually operates is an essential prelude to understanding how biblical terms of justice should be adapted to it. We do not assume that everything we need to know is in the Bible, and we cannot circumvent God's *preeminent* revelation in Jesus Christ or his revelation in creation. All three are forms of God's revelation, and all three should be consulted.

The Bible as it touches on psychology and politics (for instance) is authoritative, but it is authoritative *within* the parameters of its redemptive scope. It is not designed to tell us everything we wish to know or need to know about psychology and politics, or even everything we wish to know about framing a consistently Christian approach to psychology and politics.¹⁸

If, then, the scope of the Bible is redemptive-historical, *we can expect that the products of exegesis will conform to this scope*. If they do not, we might question whether we have correctly interpreted it. Take, for example, a theology of biblical justice that relies exclusively on the Old Testament, avoids the saviorhood and lordship of Jesus Christ, and would be theoretically acceptable to orthodox Judaism (or perhaps even moderate Islam) for that reason—the so-called second table of the Ten Commandments. Whatever may be the *strategic* merits of such an exegesis for creating a Judeo-Christian-Islamic coalition in countering a secular society, one thing is certain: if the Bible's scope is Christic, that exegesis cannot be valid.

The Bible is authoritative in terms of its focus, and that focus is the redemption accomplished in human history in the person of Jesus Christ.

AUTHORITY AND HISTORY

Second, we might ask, if the Bible bears God's authority in communicating and interpreting these crucial historical events, how as a document is it *itself* related to history?¹⁹ After all, the Bible comes to us in very human words imbedded in very concrete historical circumstances and bears all the conditioning and coloring of history. It may seem odd to us, but though the Bible makes universal claims (e.g., Romans 3:19), it largely lacks a universal outlook. It concentrates itself on

what Jehovah did for an obscure, ragtag tribe in the ancient Near East and in the life and death and resurrection of a simple carpenter from Nazareth. How different from the grand philosophic schemes of Plato and the ancient Greek philosophers and their sweeping, universal systems of virtue, goodness, justice, and morality! This "scandal of particularity"²⁰ is *the scandal of Christianity*—and of the Bible: it presents a concrete particular and demands that the reputable "universals" of the world bow to these scandalous particulars.²¹ The history of the Bible is of the very essence of its message; there can be no faith without *that* history.

The Bible itself is a crucial part of that history. It is the product of the Holy Spirit's carrying along men of old and "inspiring" them to speak and write words recorded in the Bible (2 Peter 1:20–21; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). God decided not to circumvent ordinary processes of the milieu of history in communicating his written revelation. This means that the Bible is susceptible of historical investigation. It is not enough to say that the Bible is the Word of God but that whether Moses actually lived, or how long Israel was enslaved in Egypt, or what Jewish sect Paul was a part of, is irrelevant. The Bible is not only revelation; *it is a revelation that presupposes a history*, and to sever the revelation from that history is to undermine the revelation itself. It will not suffice to argue that we need only cull the "theology of Paul" but refuse to investigate the historical circumstances that influenced Paul's writing—*there is no theology without that history*. Nor will it suffice to say that since the Bible is divinely inspired, we need only to grasp its universalized ethical and religious message, as though the Bible were like the Koran and dropped out of heaven directly to men. The message comes to us woven into the very fabric of the human history of millennia ago, and the *divine* message rests squarely within *human* history.

God's choice to inspire a book employing the active instrumentality of "men of old" was equally a choice to render the Bible vulnerable to the wear and tear, the imbalances and unpredictability, and even the hazards, of human history.²² If the Bible is a book imbedded in history, we cannot bypass that

history in our quest to understand it. And we must take the risks that this "historicalness" poses to our traditional interpretations.²³

A prime example of this vulnerability is the present debate over the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP), at the center of which is the scholarship of J. D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright.²⁴ In one form or another the NPP suggests that certain traditional understandings of Paul have been mistaken, most notably the idea that he saw in the Judaism of his day a massive legalistic strain that reveled in a meritorious works-righteousness, much like the Reformers believed they were encountering in Rome. The proponents of the NPP declare on the basis of careful historical investigation that Second Temple Judaism was *not* legalistic in this way and that Paul was *not* in fact reacting against a legalism when he framed a view of the law and of justification. Whether we agree with the NPP or not, we must acknowledge that this *kind* of theological (re)construction is always welcome for consideration, in that it is attempting to open up to us the historical matrix without which it is impossible to grasp the meaning of the text.

In Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's oft-repeated dictum, "A text cannot mean what it never meant";²⁵ but what it meant cannot be discerned without intentional recourse to the historical factors—spiritual, cultural, existential, social, political—out of which it arose. In this sense, all exegesis must be *grammatical-historical*—it must try to ascertain what the writer was intending to communicate in his original historical context. To be sure, the Holy Spirit can adopt and apply the text in new and exciting ways²⁶—we see this even in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 2:14–15)—but the meaning is (or meanings are) always grounded in the historical sense of the text as it was originally uttered or written.

We must follow this exegesis wherever it leads us, no matter what the cost to our theological pre-commitments.²⁷ Willingness to question or overturn traditional theological tenets on the basis of the persuasive products of historical investigation is part of the commitment to a biblical authority that cannot be severed from the history in which the text emerged.

If we are unwilling to do this, we are trying to protect our traditions from the searchlight of the Word of God, whose meaning cannot be accounted for apart from (ancient) history.²⁸ As time passes, and as we learn more about the history of Israel and the rest of the ancient Near East, we must adjust our understanding of the biblical text. This is why we can expect that the progress of history engenders a progress in exegesis. This is also why a static exegesis is never possible. Over time, we discover historical evidence that compels us to understand the Bible in a new light.

Included in the dictum *sola Scriptura* is a commitment to the Bible rightly interpreted.²⁹ To say that the Bible is our sole authority but to sever it from the historical circumstances in which it rose—circumstances without which we cannot grasp its meaning, and on the other hand, to harness it to a traditional interpretation that does not enjoy historical warrant—is to undercut *sola Scriptura*, no matter how loudly we may profess it.

This unswerving commitment to historical investigation should not be equated with what is sometimes called the historical-critical method, or simply "higher" biblical criticism, particularly if this is defined as the subjection of the Bible to investigation freighted with anti-supernaturalistic assumptions.³⁰ A crucial aspect of understanding the Bible historically is understanding it as the inspired Word of God. Historical methods that approach the Bible as they would any other book do not do justice to its actual character and therefore cannot expect accurate results. The course of the so-called higher critical method has been to warp and eviscerate the biblical message and wreak havoc on the church. The problem with this method is not that it is historical, nor that it is critical, but that it refuses to account for the *nature* of the book it investigates. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it must be investigated on its own terms.³¹

In addition, since the Bible unfolds in the process of history, and since it itself partakes of that history, we can expect it to be a progress of revelation.³² The revelation unfolds like a blossoming flower as we move along the timeline of history.

For this reason, we do not allow an isolated reading of the Old Testament to establish our categories of what the Bible might say but rather must allow the New Testament to reflect on and inform the *Old* Testament. If we had access only to the Old Testament, we might suppose that God would establish the new covenant only with ethnic Israel (Jeremiah 31:31–40), but from the New Testament we know that this is plainly not the case (2 Corinthians 3). In a certain sense, then, we read the Bible *backwards*. Paul's epistles are a sort of theological reflection on the Gospels, interpreting the redemptive ministry of Jesus.³³ The Gospels reveal the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, types, and shadows. And so on. Later biblical revelation sees itself in conscious continuity with the earlier revelation (2 Peter 3:14–16) and interprets and explains it. We must read the earlier in light of the later.

If the Bible is a book within and about history, the goal of our interpretation must be to understand *that* history, including the general events surrounding redemptive history. This understanding dictates a conscious historical trajectory. We must not skim across the surface, playing with "textuality," but must *drill down* to the history that the text attests and interprets. The most important thing is not the structure and arrangement of the text but the history to which it points. Literary genre, for instance, is vastly secondary to biblical history. In fact, it is conceivable that the Bible could have been written in a different genre than it was without in any way diluting or distorting its message. The central issue of the Bible, as we have seen, is *history*; it is not literature as such, though the Bible itself in its literary form has become a part of the historical revelation that it attests and interprets. When we press for a heightened interest in "textuality," we often construct a theology based more on interaction with the text and less with the history for whose service the text exists. Our interpretation, in fact, must be less concerned with internal textual harmony than with conformity to the events that the Bible itself reveals and interprets.

These are just a few of the ways in which the authority of the Bible as an historical Word impinges on its interpretation.

AUTHORITY AND SPIRIT

Finally, the Bible is authoritative in that it is authored by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21). We often do not think in terms of the authority of the Holy Spirit; but as the third Person of the Trinity, he is no less authoritative when he speaks to us than the Father or the Son, and he speaks most prominently in, and in accordance with, the Bible that he inspired. He so moved on "men of old" that the words they spoke and recorded were—and are—God's revelation to us. This is the mystery and miracle of inspiration.

In this context we often speak not only of inspiration but also of infallibility, a word the church has employed for much of its history to describe the trustworthiness of the Bible. If the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, and if he is its primary author, then we can assume that this Word is infallible since we cannot imagine that the Spirit of truth (1 John 4:6) would inspire error. It is important to remember, however, that the divine authority of Scripture does not rest on its infallibility. It is possible for geometrical theorems to be infallible, but they are not the Word of God. Scripture is authoritative because it is the Word of God, not because of any of its "properties."

Nor does this infallibility imply conformity to modern or Enlightenment standards of accuracy. The Bible itself is authoritative, and all human standards must be judged in terms of the Bible; it must never be judged in terms of human standards.³⁴ The Bible is a pre-modern book and bears all the marks of pre-modernity. The miracle of divine inspiration includes the use of the words and thought forms and world-views of ancient cultures to communicate God's truth to Jesus' disciples. Inspiration does not invite us to excuse these historical factors, to apologize that the Bible contains round numbers, that parallel accounts in the Gospels are not identical, that the books of Kings and Chronicles sometimes do not harmonize with one another, that the universe is a three-decked arrangement, and so on. We revel in the incarnational character of the Bible—that it encounters us in *human* history. We do not call these phenomena "errors," but neither do we explain them away by excessive attempts at harmonization or

recourse to (lower) textual criticism. We simply say that the Bible is *truthful* and that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and may inspire the Bible in any way he chooses. He gets to select the textual product of inspiration; we do not. We must be content with the Bible he actually has given us.

More importantly, since the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, it is a spiritual book that must be spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). Paul writes that the mere letter of the old covenant Scripture kills, but the Spirit in conjunction with the Word grants life (2 Corinthians 3:1–6). Jesus declared that his words were Spirit and therefore living (John 6:63). The Word of God is a living Word (Hebrews 4:12) in unity with the Spirit (John 14:16–26). Word and Spirit are a duo. Spirit without Word leads to subjectivism; Word without Spirit leads to deadness. The authority of Scripture, including its infallibility, rests in a *union* of Word and Spirit.³⁵

In our interpretation, therefore, we must recognize this unity of Word and Spirit. Jesus' disciples did not grasp what the Old Testament taught of him until he "opened their understanding" (Luke 24:44–45). Similarly, despite the best historical exegesis (which is necessary), the Holy Spirit must remove the blinders from our sinful eyes if we are to understand *his* book.³⁶

But the Holy Spirit is active, dynamic, and creative. His role in conjunction with the Scripture is not only to illumine our finite and sinful eyes to the historical exegesis of the Bible. In addition, he brings out to us (and to the church collectively) in our own existential circumstances new shades of meaning that we could not have seen before. In Acts 8 Phillip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant. Isaiah does not specify who this figure is, and the eunuch is stumped by this omission. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Phillip's heart that this man was none other than Jesus of Nazareth. He could never have arrived at that conclusion merely by reading Isaiah 53. By means of a potent life experience the Holy Spirit had revealed the profound truth that *Jesus* is in fact the Suffering Servant, a conclusion at which Phillip could not have arrived by historical exegesis

alone. Flesh and blood cannot reveal this truth; God alone can reveal it (Matthew 16:13–17).

When we read the Bible after enduring great trials, certain statements seem to take on a new meaning that we never saw before—and could never have seen before (David's laments in the Psalms, for example). And we utter, "Ah, *now* I understand!" Has the Bible's meaning changed or expanded? In its original historical sense, no, it has not changed. But it has changed for *us*, and we dare not suggest that this meaning sealed to our heart by the Holy Spirit is not implied in the revelation communicated by the text itself—that it is anything less than divine revelation mediated in Word and Spirit.³⁷ The text wedded to the Spirit is alive and sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Its meaning is anchored in, but not limited to, the original historical circumstance that gave rise to it. The miracle of Word and Spirit is the immediacy and reality of the divine message that confronts *us* as we confront *it*.

As we read the book of Acts, we encounter the dramatic effects of this unity of Word and Spirit as they find lodging in the lives of the primitive disciples. It is clear that the chief effect is *power* (Acts 1:68). The early disciples, even those who had not known Jesus personally, possessed what in the New Testament is termed the anointing, filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit first manifested in its fullness at the post-resurrection Pentecost.³⁸ They spoke with great boldness in declaring the gospel and in pressing the claims of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This power was a direct result of the union of Word and Spirit in interpretation, for the Holy Spirit had sealed to their hearts the truth that Jesus was in fact the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic promises (Acts 2) and as Lord and Christ now ruled over the universe as King. It is inconceivable that they could have spoken with such great boldness apart from the interpretation created by the same Spirit who filled and anointed them.

The Bible and our interpretation of it are not academic, stand-alone tasks but stand within a continuum of Christian responsibility as it presses toward the goal of bringing all

things into captivity to Jesus as Savior and Lord. The role of the Holy Spirit and his power in that responsibility is perhaps the most neglected dimension in the church today. The Holy Spirit supplies *power*—power for evangelism, power for pastoring, power for vocation, power for prayer, and power for everyday living. We so often seem content to live without this power, and God seems content not to grant it. Jesus tells us that he will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13), but apparently we have not asked. May God grant us, both in the interpretative task and in all our lives, the glorious, irresistible power of the Holy Spirit.

Without it we can expect nothing but failure.³⁹

Author

P. Andrew Sandlin (B.A., M.A.) is president of the Center for Cultural Leadership, a teaching elder of the Church of the King, Santa Cruz, California, and serves as an associate editor to *Reformation & Revival Journal*. He has written hundreds of popular and scholarly essays, as well as several monographs and books, including *New Flesh, New Faith: The Life-Changing Power of the Resurrection*. He is a regular contributor to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Notes

1. Oscar Cullmann, *The New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 124.
2. On the church's view of Scripture throughout her history, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Doctrine of Inspiration," in ed., Carl F. H. Henry, *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 205–17.
3. Clark H. Pinnock, "The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ," in ed., John Warwick Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), 201f.
4. Karl Barth notes that if we ask a child why a particular woman is his mother, he can only reply, "But this is my mother." Affirming the Bible as God's Word denotes a "purely given relationship. . . . [T]here can only be analytical propositions which express this relationship without trying to establish its foundation," in "The Authority and Significance of the Bible: Twelve Theses," *God Here and Now* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 45–46.
5. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 176.

6. This "ontological" apologetic was equally true in the Old Testament in which the Jews were first brought into covenant with Jehovah (Genesis 12, 17; Exodus 19) and only afterwards were given his authoritative Word (Exodus 20).
7. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 130–33.
8. Norman Shepherd, "The Nature of Biblical Authority," mimeographed paper from Westminster Theological Seminary Bookstore, 7.
9. Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).
10. George E. Ladd, "The Knowledge of God: The Saving Acts of God," in ed., Carl F. H. Henry, *Basic Christian Doctrines* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 7.
11. C. van der Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990), 47–48.
12. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 387.
13. John W. Robbins, "The Justification Controversy: A Guide for the Perplexed," *Trinity Review*, April, 2005, 2.
14. John M. Frame, "Salvation and Theological Pedagogy," *Reformation & Revival Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 [2005]: 64–65.
15. Herman Ridderbos, *Studies in Scripture and its Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 22–26.
16. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection?* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, 1997), 23–38.
17. Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1964], 1980), 97–99.
18. Although the Bible does furnish the foundational beliefs in terms of which we frame a psychology or political philosophy. See Sidney Greidanus, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship," *Christian Scholar's Review*, Vol. XI, No. 2, [1982]: 138–47.
19. Richard A. Muller, "The Importance of History," *Theology, News and Notes*, March, 1989, 14–17.
20. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Prince Press [1987], 1998), 20.
21. Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (New York: MacMillan, 1955), 159, 175–76.
22. "Whether we like it or not, [historical] criticism can touch the essence of our religion, because religion has become incarnate, and for our sakes had to become incarnate, and make itself vulnerable in historic form. As the Son of God while on earth had to expose himself to the unbelief and scorn of men, so the word of the gospel could not be what it is for us unless it were subject to the same humiliation." Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey:

- Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), ed., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 467.
23. Here we must agree with Oscar Cullmann that "[W]hen I approach the text as an exegete, I may not consider it to be certain that my Church's faith in Christ is in its essence really that of the writers of the New Testament," in *Salvation in History* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1967), 68.
 24. For a helpful (and sympathetic) survey of the "NPP," including references to the primary literature, see Don Garlington, "Law and Gospel: The Contribution of 'The New Perspective on Paul,'" *Reformation & Revival Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 [2005]: 89–116.
 25. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 27.
 26. This is against Walter Kaiser's wooden notion of the "single intended meaning." See his "The Single Intent of Scripture," in ed., Kenneth S. Kantzer, *Evangelical Roots* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 123–41.
 27. This is not to suggest that churches refuse to enforce their own orthodoxy, which in any case is inescapable, only that Christians must have the freedom to do rigorous exegesis that does not account for the theological commitments of their own church. If they arrive at conclusions that violate their own church's orthodoxy, they should maintain integrity and leave that body. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1898], 1980), 593–99.
 28. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in ed., Pannenberg, *History and Hermeneutic* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr), 123–25.
 29. Gerhard Ebeling, "'Sola Scriptura' and Tradition," *The Word of God and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 102–47.
 30. Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 130–32.
 31. Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974).
 32. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).
 33. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed [1978], 1987), 27.
 34. J. Ramsey Michaels, "Inerrancy or Verbal Inspiration? An Evangelical Dilemma," in eds., J. Ramsey Michaels and Roger R. Nicole, *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 63–68. For an even more incisive argument for this view, see James Daane, "The Odds on Inerrancy," *The Reformed Journal*, December, 1976, 5–6.
 35. Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), 114–15.
 36. John M. Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in eds., D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986, 1995), 232.
 37. Though he tends to blur inspiration and illumination, Karl Barth is

- correct to assert that the Holy Spirit *reveals* truth to the human heart in our reading of Scripture just as he revealed it to the biblical authors before they recorded it: "The meaning of this old [Reformed] doctrine of inspiration is as follows: Inspiration or revelation is conceived of as one single timeless, or better, simultaneous act of God upon the biblical authors *and* upon us. What appears to be questioning and answering between us and the biblical authors, as though they were standing inside and we outside, so to speak, is in reality a monologue of the Holy Spirit in them and in us," *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press [1923], 2002), 63, emphasis in original. Whether this view constitutes the "old [Reformed] doctrine of inspiration" is matter of dispute.
38. John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1949).
 39. I am grateful to John M. Frame, Brian Harrington, and Mark Horne for constructive criticism of this article. I alone am responsible for its flaws.